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PREPARATION FOR DEATH:

OR,

CONSIDERATIONS

ON

THE ETERNAL MAXIMS.

USEFUL FOR ALL AS A BOOK OF MEDITATIONS, &c.

BY ST. ALPHONSUS M. LIGUORI,

BISHOP OF AGATHA OF THE GOTHS, AND FOUNDER OF THE CONGREGATION OF THE MOST HOLY REDEEMER.

TRANSLATED FROM THE ITALIAN

BY A CATHOLIC CLERGYMAN.

APPROVED BY THE

RIGHT REVEREND BISHOP FITZPATRICK.

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APPROBATION.

We give our approbation to the publication of this volume of Meditations, entitled "Preparation for Death." The illustrious sanctity of the author, and his canonization by the Holy Catholic Church, are a sufficient evidence of the purity and excellence of the doctrine which they contain.

We recommend to the faithful at large the use of this volume, as most profitable for their spiritual advantage.

✠ JOHN BERNARD,
Bishop of Bos[illegible]

PROTESTATION OF ST. LIGUORI.

In obedience to the decrees of Urban VIII., I protest that, of the miraculous works and gifts ascribed, in this work, to certain servants of God, and not already approved by the Holy See, I claim no other belief than that which is ordinarily given to history resting on mere human authority; and that, in bestowing the title of Saint, or of Blessed, on any person not canonized or beatified by the church, I only intend to do it according to the usage and opinion of men.

TO THE IMMACULATE

AND

EVER-VIRGIN MARY:

TO HER WHO IS FULL OF GRACE, AND BLESSED AMONG ALL THE CHILDREN OF ADAM:

TO THE DOVE, THE TURTLE, THE BELOVED OF GOD:

HONOR OF THE HUMAN RACE, DELIGHT OF THE MOST HOLY TRINITY:

HOUSE OF LOVE, EXAMPLE OF HUMILITY,

MIRROR OF ALL VIRTUES:

MOTHER OF FAIR LOVE, MOTHER OF HOLY HOPE,

AND MOTHER OF MERCY:

ADVOCATE OF THE MISERABLE, DEFENCE OF THE WEAK,

LIGHT OF THE BLIND, PHYSICIAN OF THE SICK:

GATE OF HEAVEN:

ANCHOR OF CONFIDENCE, CITY OF REFUGE,

ARK OF LIFE, RAINBOW OF PEACE, HAVEN OF SALVATION:

STAR OF THE SEA, AND SEA OF SWEETNESS:

ADVOCATE OF SINNERS, HOPE OF THOSE WHO ARE IN DESPAIR, HELP OF THE ABANDONED:

COMFORTER OF THE AFFLICTED, CONSOLATION OF THE DYING,

AND JOY OF THE WORLD:

HER AFFECTIONATE AND LOVING, THOUGH VILE AND UNWORTHY, SERVANT

HUMBLY DEDICATES THIS WORK.

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OBJECT OF THE WORK.

NECESSARY TO BE READ.

Some persons asked me to write a book on the eternal maxims, for the use of those who desire to establish themselves in virtue and to advance in a spiritual life. Others requested me to prepare a collection of matter for the sermons of the missions and of the spiritual exercises. Not to multiply books, labor, and expense, I resolved to compose the work in its present form, with the hope that it may answer both purposes. To render it useful as a book of meditations for seculars, I have divided the considerations into three points. Each point will serve for one meditation, and therefore I have annexed to each point affections and prayers. I entreat my readers not to grow weary, if in those prayers they shall always find petitions for the graces of perseverance and of divine love. For us, these are the two

graces most necessary for the attainment of eternal salvation. The grace of divine love is, according to St. Francis de Sales, the grace which contains in itself all graces; because the virtue of charity towards God brings with it all other virtues. "*Now all good things came to me together with her.*" — Wis. vii. 11. He who loves God is humble, chaste, obedient, and mortified; in a word, he possesses all virtues. "*Love,*" says St. Augustine, "*and do what you wish.*" They who love God labor to avoid whatever is offensive to him, and seek to please him in all things.

The grace of perseverance is that grace by which we obtain the eternal crown. St. Bernard says, that paradise is promised to those who begin a good life, but is given only to those who persevere. "*To beginners a reward is promised, but to him who perseveres it is given.*" *Serm.* vi. *de Modo Ben. Viv.* But this gift of perseverance is, as the fathers teach, given only to those who ask it. Hence St. Thomas asserts, that, to enter heaven, continual prayer is necessary. "Post baptismum autem necessaria est homini jugis oratio, ad hoc quod cœlum introeat." — 3 *p.*, *q.* 39, *art.* 5. And our Redeemer has said, that "we

ought always to pray, and not to faint." — Luke xviii. 1. It is because they do not pray for the gift of perseverance, that so many miserable sinners, after having obtained pardon, lose again the grace of God. Their sins are forgiven; but because they afterwards neglect to ask of God the grace of perseverance, particularly in the time of temptations, they relapse into sin. And although the grace of final perseverance is altogether gratuitous, and cannot be merited by good works, still Suares teaches that it can be infallibly obtained by prayer; and, according to St. Augustine, it may be merited by humble supplication. "Hoc Dei donum suppliciter emereri potest, id est supplicando impetrari potest." — *De Dono Pers., cap.* vi. This necessity of prayer I have demonstrated at length in another little work, entitled *The Great Means of Prayer.* This book, though small, cost me a great deal of labor. I consider it to be of extreme utility to all sorts of persons; and I unhesitatingly assert that, among all spiritual treatises, there is none, and there can be none, more necessary than that which treats on prayer as a means of obtaining eternal salvation.

To render them useful to preachers who

have but few books or little time for reading, I have furnished these considerations, with texts of Scripture and passages from the fathers, which are short, but strong and animated, as they ought to be in sermons. The three points of each consideration will supply matter for one sermon. I have endeavored to collect from many authors the sentiments which appeared to me best calculated to move the will, and have inserted several of them, expressed briefly, that the reader may select and extend at pleasure those that please him most. May all tend to the glory of God.

I pray my reader to recommend me to Jesus Christ, whether I am living or dead; and I promise to do the same for all those who shall perform this act of charity towards me. Live, Jesus, our love, and Mary, our hope.

ST ALPHONSUS M. LIGUORI'S

PREPARATION FOR DEATH.

FIRST CONSIDERATION.

PICTURE OF A MAN WHO IS BUT A SHORT TIME GONE TO ETERNITY.

"Dust thou art, and into dust thou shalt return."—Gen. iii. 19.

FIRST POINT.

Consider that thou art dust, and that thou shalt return to dust. A day will come when thou shalt die, and rot in a grave, where "worms shall be thy covering."—Isaias xiv. 11. The same lot awaits all, the grandee and the peasant, the prince and the vassal. The moment the soul leaves the body, she shall go to her eternity, and the body shall return to dust. "Thou shalt send forth their breath, and they shall fail, and shall return to their dust."—Ps. ciii. 29.

Imagine that thou beholdest a person who has just expired. Look at that body, still laid on the bed, the head fallen on the chest, the hair in disorder, and still bathed in the sweat of death, the eyes sunk, the cheeks hollow, the face the color of ashes, the lips and tongue like iron, the body cold

and heavy. The beholders grow pale and tremble How many, at the sight of a deceased relative or friend, have changed their lives and retired from the world!

Still greater horror shall be excited when the body begins to putrefy. Twenty-four hours have not elapsed since the death of that young man, and his body has already begun to exhale an offensive smell. The windows must be opened; a great quantity of incense must be used; and, to prevent the communication of disease to the entire family, he must be soon transferred to the church, and buried under the earth. If he has been one of the rich or nobles of the earth, his body shall send forth a more intolerable stench. "Gravius fœtent," says a certain author, "divitum corpora."

Behold the end of that proud, of that lewd and voluptuous man. Before death, desired and sought after in conversations; now, become an object of horror and disgust to all who behold him. His relatives are in haste to remove him from the house; they hire men to shut him up in a coffin, to carry him to the churchyard, and throw him into a grave. During life, the fame of his wit, of his politeness, of the elegance of his manners, and of his facetiousness, flew in every direction; but after death, he is soon forgotten. "Their memory hath perished with a noise." — Ps. ix. 7.

On hearing the news of his death, some say, "He was an honor to his family:" others say, "He has provided well for his children." Some regret his death because he had done them some services during life: others rejoice at it because it is an advantage to them. But in a little time no one shall speak of him. In the beginning, his nearest relatives feel unwilling to hear his name, through fear

of renewing their grief. In the visits of condolence, all are careful to make no allusion to the deceased; and should any one happen to speak of him, the relatives exclaim, "For God's sake, do not mention his name."

Consider that, as thou hast acted on the occasion of the death of friends and relatives, so others shall act on the occasion of thy death. The living take part in the scene. They occupy the possessions and offices of the deceased; but the dead are no longer remembered — their name is scarcely ever mentioned. In the beginning, their relatives will be afflicted for a short time; but they shall soon be consoled by the portion of the property of the deceased which will fall to them.

Thus in a short time thy death shall be rather a source of joy; and in the very room in which thou shalt have breathed forth thy soul, and in which thou shalt be judged by Jesus Christ, others will dance, and eat, and play, and laugh, as before. And where shall thy soul then be?

Affections and Prayers.

O Jesus, my Redeemer, I thank thee for not having taken me out of life when I was thy enemy. For how many years have I deserved to be in hell! Had I died on such a day or such a night, what should be my lot for all eternity? Lord, I thank thee: I accept my death in satisfaction for my sins, and I accept it in the manner in which thou wilt be pleased to send it. But since thou hast borne with me till now, wait for me a little longer. "Suffer me, therefore, that I may lament my sorrow a little." — Job x. 20. Give me time to bewail, before thou dost judge me, the offences I have offered to thee. I will no longer resist thy calls. Who knows but

the words which I have just read may be the last call for me? I acknowledge that I am unworthy of mercy. Thou hast so often pardoned me, and I have ungratefully offended thee again. "A contrite and humble heart, O Lord, thou wilt not despise."—Ps. l. 19. Since, O Lord, thou knowest not how to despise an humbled and contrite heart, behold the penitent traitor who has recourse to thee. "Cast me not away from thy face."—Ps. l. 13. For thy mercy's sake, cast me not away from thy face. Thou hast said, "Him that cometh to me I will not cast out."—John vi. 37. It is true that I have outraged thee more than others, because I have been favored more than others with thy lights and graces. But the blood thou hast shed for me encourages me, and offers me pardon if I repent. My Sovereign Good, I am sorry with my whole soul for having insulted thee. Pardon me, and give me grace to love thee for the future. I have offended thee sufficiently. The remainder of my life I wish to spend, not in offending thee, but only in weeping unceasingly over the insults I have offered to thee, and in loving with my whole heart a God worthy of infinite love. O Mary, my hope, pray to Jesus for me.

SECOND POINT.

But, Christian soul, that thou mayst see more clearly what thou art, follow the advice of St. Chrysostom: "Go to the grave; contemplate dust, ashes, worms; and sigh." Behold how that corpse first turns yellow, and then black. Afterwards, the entire body is covered with a white, disgusting mould; then comes forth a clammy, fetid slime, which flows to the earth. In that putrid mass is generated a great crowd of worms, which feed on the flesh

Rats come to feast on the body; some attack it on the outside; others enter into the mouth and bowels. The cheeks, the lips, and the hair, fall off. The ribs are first laid bare, and then the arms and legs. The worms, after having consumed all the flesh, devour each other; and in the end, nothing remains but a fetid skeleton, which in the course of time falls in pieces; the bones separate from each other, and the head separates from the body. "They became like the chaff of a summer's threshing-floor, and they were carried away by the wind." — Dan. ii. 35. Behold what man is; he is a little dust on the threshing-floor, which is blown away by the wind.

Behold a young nobleman, who was called the life and soul of conversation: where is he now? Enter into his apartment: he is no longer there. If thou look for his bed, his robes, or his armor, thou shalt find that they have passed into the hands of others. If thou wish to see himself, turn to the grave, where he is changed into corruption and withered bones. O God! that body, pampered with so many delicacies, clothed with so much pomp, and attended by so many servants, — to what is it now reduced? O saints, who knew how to mortify your bodies for the love of that God whom alone you loved on this earth, you well understood the end of all human greatness, of all earthly delights; now your bones are honored as sacred relics, and preserved in shrines of gold, and your souls are happy in the enjoyment of God, expecting the last day, on which your bodies shall be made partners of your glory, as they have been partakers of your cross in this life. The true love for the body consists in treating it here with rigor and contempt, that it may be happy for eternity, and in refusing it all pleasures which should make it miserable forever.

Affections and Prayers.

Behold, then, my God, to what my body, by which I have so much offended thee, must be reduced! — to worms and rottenness. This does not afflict me. On the contrary, I rejoice that this flesh of mine, which has made me lose thee, my Sovereign Good, shall one day rot and be consumed. What grieves me is, that, to indulge in these wretched pleasures, I have given so much displeasure to thee. But I will not despair of thy mercy. Thou hast waited for me in order to pardon me. "The Lord waiteth, that he may have mercy on you." — Isaias xxx. 18. Thou wilt forgive me if I repent. O Infinite Goodness, I repent with my whole heart of having despised thee. I will say with St. Catharine of Genoa, "*My Jesus, no more sins! no more sins!*" I will no longer abuse thy patience. O my crucified love, I will not wait till the confessor shall place the crucifix in my hands at the hour of death. From this moment I embrace thee; from this moment I recommend my soul to thee. "Into thy hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit." My soul has been so many years in the world, and has not loved thee! Give me light and strength to love thee during the remainder of my life. I will not wait to love thee at the hour of death. From this moment I love thee; I embrace thee, and unite myself to thee; and I promise never more to depart from thee. O most holy Virgin, bind me to Jesus Christ, and obtain for me the grace never to lose him more.

THIRD POINT.

My brother, in this picture of death behold thyself, and what thou must one day become. Re-

member that "dust thou art, and into dust thou shalt return." Consider that in a few years, and perhaps in a few months or days, thou shalt become rottenness and worms. By this thought Job became a saint. "I have said to rottenness, Thou art my father; to worms, my mother and my sister." — Job xvii. 14.

All must end; and if, after death, thou shalt lose thy soul, all shall be lost for thee. Consider thyself already dead, says St. Lawrence Justinian, since thou knowest that thou shalt of necessity die. "Considera te jam mortuum, quem scis de necessitate moriturum." — *De Ligno Vitæ, cap.* iv. If thou wert already dead, what wouldst thou not desire to have done? Now that thou hast life, reflect that thou shalt be one day among the dead. St. Bonaventure says, that, to guide the vessel safely, the pilot must remain at the helm; and in like manner, to lead a good life, a man should always imagine himself at the hour of death. "Vide prima," says St. Bernard, "et erubesce." Look to the sins of thy youth, and be covered with shame. "Vide media, et ingemisce." Remember the sins of manhood, and weep. "Vide novissima, et contremisce." Look to the present disorders of thy life; tremble, and hasten to apply a remedy.

When St. Camillus de Lellis saw the graves of the dead, he said within himself, "If these returned to life, what would they not do for eternal glory? And what do I, who have time, do for my soul?" This the saint said through humility. But, my brother, thou, perhaps, hast just reason to fear that thou art the fruitless fig-tree of which the Lord said, "Behold, for these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig-tree, and I find none." — Luke xiii. 7 Thou art in this world more than three years; what

fruit hast thou produced? Remember, says St. Bernard, that the Lord seeks not only flowers, but fruits; that is, not only good desires and resolutions, but also holy works. Learn, then, to profit of the time which God in his mercy gives thee: do not wait until thou desirest time to do good, when time shall be no more. Do not wait till thou shalt be told, "*Tempus non erit amplius: proficiscere.*" Time shall be no longer: depart; the time for leaving this world has arrived: what is done, is done.

Affections and Prayers.

Behold me, O my God; I am that tree which deserved for so many years to hear from thee, "Cut it down — why cumbereth it the ground?" —Luke xiii. 7. Yes; for so many years which I have been in the world, I have brought forth no other fruit than the briers and thorns of sin. But, O Lord, thou dost not wish that I despair. Thou hast said to all, that he who seeks thee shall find thee. "Seek, and thou shalt find." I seek thee, O my God, and wish for thy grace. For all the offences I have offered to thee, I am sorry with my whole heart; I would wish to die of sorrow for them. Hitherto I have fled from thee; but now I prefer thy friendship to the possession of all the kingdoms of the earth. I will no longer resist thy invitations. Dost thou wish me to be all thine? I give thee my whole being without reserve. Thou gavest thyself entirely to me on the cross. I give myself entirely to thee.

Thou hast said, "If thou shalt ask me any thing in my name, that I will do." — John xiv. 14. My Jesus, trusting in this great promise, I ask, in thy

name and through thy merits, thy grace and thy love. Grant that thy grace and thy holy love may abound in my soul, in which sin has abounded. I thank thee for having given me grace to make this petition: by inspiring the prayer, thou showest that thou dost intend to hear it. Hear me, O my Jesus: give me a great love for thee; give me a great desire to please thee, and give me strength to do thy will. O Mary, my great advocate, do thou also listen to my cry, and pray to Jesus for me.

SECOND CONSIDERATION.

WITH DEATH ALL ENDS.

"An end is come; the end is come."—Ezec. vii. 6.

FIRST POINT.

By worldlings, they only are esteemed happy, who enjoy the pleasures, the riches, and pomps of this world; but death puts an end to all these earthly goods. "For what is your life? It is a vapor which appeareth for a little while."—St. James iv. 15. The vapors exhaled from the earth, when raised in the air and clothed with light by the sun, make a splendid appearance; but how long does their splendor last? It vanishes before the first blast of the wind. Behold that grandee! to-day he is courted, feared, and almost adored; to-morrow he is dead, despised, reviled, and trampled on. At death we must leave all things. The brother of that great servant of God, Thomas a Kempis, took complacency in speaking of a beauti-

ful house which he had built for himself: a friend told him that it had one great defect. "What is it?" said he. "It is," replied the other, "that you have made a door in it." "What!" rejoined the brother of a Kempis, "is a door a defect?" "Yes," answered the friend; "for through this door you must be one day carried dead, and must leave the house and all things."

Death, in fine, strips man of all the goods of this world. O, what a spectacle to behold a prince banished from his palace, never more to return to it, and to see others take possession of his furniture, of his money, and of all his other goods! The servants leave him in the grave, with a garment scarcely sufficient to cover his body. There is no longer any one to esteem or flatter him, no longer any one to attend to his commands. Saladin, who had acquired many kingdoms in Asia, gave directions, at death, that, when his body should be carried to the place of burial, a person should go before, holding his winding-sheet suspended from a pole, and crying aloud, "*This is all that Saladin brings with him to the grave.*"

When the body of the prince is laid in the tomb, his flesh falls in pieces; and behold, his skeleton can be no longer distinguished from that of others. "Contemplare sepulchra," says St. Basil, "vide utrum poteris discernere quis servus, quis dominus fuerit." Contemplate the sepulchres of the dead, and see if you can distinguish who has been a servant, and who has been master. Diogenes appeared one day, in the presence of Alexander the Great, to seek with great anxiety for something among the bones of the dead. Alexander asked him what he was in search of. "I am looking," replied Diogenes, "for the head of Philip, your father

I am not able to distinguish it: if you can find it, show it to me." "Si tu potes, ostende." Men are born unequal; but, after death, all are equal. "Impares nascimur," said Seneca, "pares morimur." And Horace says that death brings down the sceptre to the level of the mattock. "Sceptra ligonibus æquat." In a word, when death comes, *the end comes*, all ends; we leave all things; and of all that we possess in this world, we bring nothing to the grave.

Affections and Prayers.

My Lord, since thou givest me light to know that whatever the world esteems is smoke and folly, grant me strength to detach my heart from earthly goods, before death separates me from them. Miserable that I have been! How often, for the miserable pleasures and goods of this earth, have I offended and lost thee, who art an infinite good! O my Jesus, my heavenly Physician, cast thy eyes on my poor soul, look at the many wounds which I have inflicted on it by my sins, and have pity on me. If thou wishest, thou canst make me clean. "Si vis, potes me mundare." I know that thou art able and willing to heal me; but, in order to heal me, thou dost wish me to repent of the injuries which I have committed against thee. I am sorry for them from the bottom of my heart. Heal me, then, now that it is in thy power to heal me. "Heal my soul, for I have sinned against thee." — Ps. xl. 5. I have forgotten thee; but thou hast not forgotten me; and now thou makest me feel that thou wilt even forget the injuries I have done thee, if I detest them. "But if the wicked do penance.... I will not remember all his iniquities." — Ezec xviii. 21. Behold, I detest my sins, I hate them above

all things. Forget, then, O my Redeemer, all the displeasure I have given thee. For the future, I will lose all things, even life, rather than forfeit thy grace. And what can all the goods of this earth profit me without thy grace?

Ah, assist me; thou knowest my weakness. Hell will not cease to tempt me: it already prepares a thousand attacks to make me again its slave. No, my Jesus, do not abandon me. I wish to be henceforth the slave of thy love. Thou art my only Lord: thou hast created and redeemed me; thou hast loved me more than all others; thou alone hast merited my love; thee alone do I wish to love.

SECOND POINT.

At the hour of death, Philip the Second, king of Spain, called his son, and, throwing off his royal robe, uncovered his breast, which was eaten away by worms, and said to him, "Prince, behold how we die! see how all the grandeurs of this world end!" Theodoret has truly said, that death fears neither riches, nor satellites, nor sovereigns; and that from princes, as well as from vassals, rottenness and corruption flow. "Nec divitias mors metuit, nec satellites, nec purpuram; putredo sequitur, et sanies defluit." Thus the dead, though they be princes, bring nothing with them to the grave; all their glory remains on the bed on which they expire. "When he shall die, he shall take nothing away, nor shall his glory descend with him." — Ps. xlviii. 18.

St. Antonine relates, that, after the death of Alexander the Great, a certain philosopher exclaimed, "Behold, the man who yesterday trampled on the earth, is now buried under the earth. Yesterday,

the whole earth was not sufficient for him, and now he is content with seven palms. Yesterday, he led his armies through the earth, and now he is carried by a few porters to the grave." But it is better to listen to the words of God. "Why," says the Holy Ghost, "is earth and ashes proud?" — Eccles. x. 9. O man, do you not see that you are dust and ashes? Why are you proud? Why do you spend so many thoughts and so many years of life in seeking worldly greatness? Death shall come, and then all your greatness and all your projects shall be at an end. "In that day," says David, "all their thoughts shall perish." — Ps. cxlv. 4.

O, how much more happy was the death of St. Paul the Hermit, who lived sixty years shut up in a cave, than the death of Nero, the emperor of Rome! How much more happy was the death of St. Felix, a Capuchin lay brother, than that of Henry the Eighth, who lived in the midst of royal magnificence, but, at the same time, in enmity with God! But we must remember that, to secure a happy death, the saints have abandoned all things; they have left their country; they have renounced the delights and the hopes which the world held out to them, and have embraced a life of poverty and contempt. But how can worldlings, living in the midst of sins, in the midst of earthly pleasures and dangerous occasions, expect a happy death? God warns sinners that at death they shall seek and shall not find him. — John 7. 34. He tells us that the hour of death shall be the time, not of mercy, but of vengeance. — Deut. xxxii. 35. "I will repay them in due time." Reason tells us the same; for, at death, men of the world shall find their understanding weak and darkened, and their heart hardened by the bad habits which they had contracted. Their temptations

shall be then more violent; how can they resist at death, who were almost always accustomed to yield to, and to be conquered by, temptations during life? To change their hearts, a most powerful grace would be then necessary. But is God obliged to give them such a grace? Have they merited such a grace by the scandalous and disorderly lives which they led? And on that last hour depends their happiness or misery for eternity. How is it possible that he who reflects on this, and believes the truths of faith, does not leave all things to give himself to God, who shall judge us all according to our works?

Affections and Prayers.

Ah, Lord! how many nights have I slept in enmity with thee! O God! in what a miserable state was my soul during that time! It was hated by thee, and wished to be hated by thee. I was condemned to hell; there was nothing wanting but the execution of the sentence. But thou, my God, hast never ceased to seek after me and to invite me to pardon. But who can assure me that thou hast pardoned me? Must I, O my Jesus, live in this uncertainty till thou dost judge me? But the sorrow which I feel for having offended thee, my desire to love thee, and still more, thy passion, O my beloved Redeemer, make me hope that thy grace dwells in my soul. I am sorry for having offended thee, O Sovereign Good, and I love thee above all things. I resolve to forfeit every thing rather than lose thy grace and thy love. Thou dost wish that the heart which seeks thee should be full of joy. "Let the heart of them rejoice that seek the Lord." — 1 Par. xvi. 10. Lord, I detest all the injuries I have offered to thee. Give me courage and confidence; do not upbraid me with my ingratitude; for I myself know

and detest it. Thou hast said that thou willest not the death of a sinner, but that he be converted and live. — Ezec. iii. 11. Yes, my God, I leave all things and turn to thee. I seek thee, I desire thee, I love thee above all things. Give me thy love; I ask nothing else. O Mary, thou, after Jesus, art my hope; obtain for me holy perseverance.

THIRD POINT.

David calls the happiness of this life a dream of one who awakes from a sleep. — Ps. lxxii. 20. In explaining these words, a certain author says, "Somnium, quia sopitis sensibus res magnæ apparent, et non sunt, et cito avolant." The goods of this world appear great, but they are nothing; like a dream, which lasts but a little, and afterwards vanishes, they are enjoyed but a short time. The thought that with death all ends, made St. Francis Borgia resolve to give himself entirely to God. The saint was obliged to accompany the dead body of the empress Isabella to Granada. When the coffin was opened, her appearance was so horrible, and the smell so intolerable, that all ran away. But St. Francis remained to contemplate, in the dead body of his sovereign, the vanity of the world; and, looking at it, he exclaimed, "Are you, then, my empress? Are you the queen before whom so many bent their knee in reverential awe? O Isabella, where is your majesty, your beauty gone? Thus, then," he said within himself, "end the greatness and the crowns of this world. I will, therefore, henceforth serve a Master who can never die." From that moment he consecrated himself to the love of Jesus crucified; and he made a vow to become a religious, should his wife die before him. This vow

he afterwards fulfilled by entering into the Society of Jesus.

Justly, then, has a person who was undeceived, written on the head of a dead man these words — "*Cogitanti vilescunt omnia.*" To him who reflects on death, every thing in this world appears contemptible; he cannot love the earth. And why are there so many unhappy lovers of this world? It is because they do not think of death. "O ye sons of men, how long will you be dull of heart? Why do you love vanity, and seek after lying?" — Ps. iv. 3. "Miserable children of Adam," says the Holy Ghost, "why do you not chase away from your hearts so many earthly affections, which make you love vanity and lies?" What has happened to your forefathers, must befall you. They have dwelt in the same palace which you inhabit, and have slept in your very bed; but now they are no more. Such, too, shall be your lot.

My brother, give yourself, then, to God before death comes upon you. "Whatsoever thy hand is able to do, do it earnestly." — Eccl. ix. 10. What you can do to-day, defer not till to-morrow; for a day once past never returns, and to-morrow death may come, and prevent you from ever more being able to do good. Detach yourself instantly from every thing which removes, or can remove, you from God. Let us instantly renounce in affection the goods of this earth, before death strips us of them by force. "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord." — Apoc. xiv. 13. Happy they who at death are already dead to all attachment to this world. They fear not, but desire death, and embrace it with joy; for, instead of separating them from the good which they love, it unites them with the Supreme Good, who is the sole object of their affec-

tions, and who will render them happy for eternity.

Affections and Prayers.

My dear Redeemer, I thank thee for having waited for me. What should have become of me, had I died when I was at a distance from thee? May thy mercy and patience, which I have experienced for so many years, be forever blessed. I thank thee for the light and grace with which thou dost now assist me. I did not then love thee, and I cared but little to be loved by thee. I now love thee with my whole heart, and nothing grieves me so much as the thought of having displeased so good a God. This sorrow tortures my soul; but it is a sweet torment, because it gives me confidence that thou hast already pardoned me. O, my sweet Savior, that I had died a thousand times, before I sinned against thee! I tremble lest I should hereafter offend thee again. Ah! make me die the most painful of all deaths, rather than permit me ever more to lose thy grace. I have been once the slave of hell; but now I am thy servant, O God of my soul. Thou hast said that thou lovest those who love thee. — Prov. viii. 17 I love thee: then I am thine, and thou art mine. I may lose thee at some future time. But the grace which I ask of thee is, to take me out of life rather than suffer me ever to lose thee again. Unasked, thou hast bestowed upon me so many graces, I cannot now fear that thou wilt not hear my prayer for the grace which I now implore. Do not permit me ever to lose thee. Give me thy love, and I desire nothing more. Mary, my hope, intercede for me.

THIRD CONSIDERATION.

SHORTNESS OF LIFE.

"What is your life? It is a vapor which appeareth for a little while."—St. James iv. 15.

FIRST POINT.

What is your life? It is like a vapor, which is dissipated by a blast of wind, and is seen no more. All know that they must die; but the delusion of many is, that they imagine death as far off as if it were never to arrive. But Job tells us that the life of man is short. "Man born of a woman, living for a short time,—who cometh forth like a flower, and is destroyed."—Job xiv. 1, 2. This truth the Lord commanded Isaias to preach to the people. "Cry, All flesh is grass. Indeed, the people is grass. The grass is withered, and the flower is fallen."—Isa. xl. 6, etc. The life of man is like the life of a blade of grass; death comes, the grass is dried up: behold, life ends, and the flower of all greatness and of all worldly goods falls off

"My days," said Job, "have been swifter than a post."—Job ix. 25 Death runs to meet us more swiftly than a post, and we at every moment run to death. Every step, every breath brings us nearer to our end. "What I write," says Jerome, "is taken away from my life." During the time I write, I draw near to death. "We all die, and, like the waters that return no more, we fall into the earth."—2 Kings xiv. 14. Behold how the stream flows to the sea, and the passing waters never return. Thus, my brother, your days pass by, and you approach to death. Pleasures, amusements,

pomps, praises, and acclamations pass away; and what remains? "And only the grave remaineth for me."—Job xvii. 1. We shall be thrown into a grave, and there we shall remain to rot, stripped of all things. At the hour of death, the remembrance of the delights enjoyed, and of all the honors acquired in this life, shall serve only to increase our pain and our diffidence of obtaining eternal salvation. Then the miserable worldling shall say, "My house, my gardens, my fashionable furniture, my pictures, my garments, shall in a little time be no longer mine, 'and only the grave remaineth for me.'"

Ah! at that hour all earthly goods are viewed only with pain by those who have had an attachment for them. And this pain shall serve only to increase the danger of their eternal salvation; for we see by experience, that persons attached to the world wish at death to speak only of their sickness, of the physicians to be called to attend them, and of the remedies which may restore their health. When any one speaks of the state of the soul, they soon grow weary, and beg to be allowed repose. They complain of headache, and say that it pains them to hear any one speak. And if they sometimes answer, they are confused, and know not what to say. It often happens that the confessor gives them absolution, not because he knows that they are disposed for the sacrament, but because it is dangerous to defer it. Such the death of those who think but little of death.

Affections and Prayers.

Ah! my God and Lord of infinite majesty, I am ashamed to appear before thee. How often have I dishonored thee by preferring to thy grace a sordid

pleasure, a little dust, the indulgence of anger, caprice, or vanity! I adore and kiss, O my Redeemer, thy holy wounds, which I have inflicted by my sins; but through these wounds I hope for pardon and salvation. Make me, O my Jesus, understand the great injury I have done thee in leaving thee, the fountain of every good, to drink putrid and poisoned waters. Of all the offences I have given thee, nothing now remains but pain, remorses of conscience, and merits for hell. Father, I am not worthy to be called thy child. My Father, do not cast me off. It is true that I no longer merit the grace which would make me thy child; but thou hast died to pardon me. Thou hast said, "Turn ye to me, and I will turn to thee."—Zach. i. 3. I give up all my satisfactions, I renounce all the pleasures which the world can give me, and I turn to thee. Pardon me for the sake of the blood which has been shed for me; I repent with my whole heart of all the insults I have offered thee. I repent, and I love thee above all things. I am not worthy to love thee; but thou dost not refuse the love of a heart that has once despised thee. Thou didst purposely abstain from taking me out of life when I was in sin, that I might love thee. I wish to love thee during the remainder of my life, and I wish to love nothing but thee. Assist me; give me holy perseverance, and thy holy love. Mary, my refuge, recommend me to Jesus Christ.

SECOND POINT.

The king Ezechias said with tears, "My life is cut off, as by a weaver; whilst I was yet beginning, he cut me off."—Isa. xxxviii. 12. O, how many have been overtaken and cut off by

death, while they were executing and arranging worldly projects devised with so much labor! At the light of the last candle, every thing in this world — applauses, diversions, pomps, and greatness — vanishes. Great secret of death! It makes us see what the lovers of this world do not see. The most princely fortunes, the most exalted dignities, and the most superb triumphs, lose all their splendor when viewed from the bed of death. The ideas which we have formed of certain false happiness, are then changed into indignation against our own folly. The black and gloomy shade of death then covers and obscures every dignity, even that of kings and princes.

At present, our passions make the goods of this earth appear different from what they are in reality. Death takes off the veil, and makes them appear what they really are, — smoke, dung, vanity, and wretchedness. O God! of what use are riches, possessions, or kingdoms, at death, when nothing remains but a wooden coffin, and a simple garment, barely sufficient to cover the body? Of what use are the honors, when they all end in a funeral procession and a pompous obsequy, which will be unprofitable to the soul if it be in hell? Of what use is beauty, when, after death, nothing remains but worms, stench, and horror, and in the end a little fetid dust?

"He hath made me," says Job, "as it were a by-word of the people, and an example before them." — Job xvii. 6. The rich man, the captain, the minister of state, dies: his death is the general topic of conversation; but if he has led a bad life, he shall become "a by-word of the people, and an example before them." As an instance of the vanity of the world, and even of the divine justice,

he will serve for the admonition of others. After burial, his body shall be mingled with the bodies of the poor. "The small and great are there." — Job iii. 19. What profit has he derived from the beautiful structure of his body, which is now but a heap of worms? Of what use is the power and authority which he wielded, when his body is now left to rot in a grave, and his soul has, perhaps, been sent to burn in hell? O, what misery! to be the occasion of such reflections to others, and not to have made them for his own profit! Let us then persuade ourselves that the proper time for repairing the disorders of the soul, is not the hour of death, but the time of health. Let us hasten to do now what we shall not be able to do at that hour. *The time is short.* All soon passes away, and comes to an end; let us therefore labor to employ all things for the attainment of eternal life.

Affections and Prayers.

O God of my soul, O infinite goodness, have mercy on me, who have so grievously offended thee. I knew that, in yielding to sin, I should lose thy grace, and I have voluntarily lost it. Tell me what I must do in order to recover it. If thou wishest me to repent of my sins, behold, I repent of them with my whole heart; I wish to die of sorrow for them. If thou wishest me to hope for thy pardon, I hope for it through the merits of thy blood. If thou wishest me to love thee above all things, I give up all, I renounce all the pleasures and goods which the world can give me; I love thee above every good, O my most amiable Savior. If thou wishest me to ask thy graces, I beg two graces from thee: — do not permit me ever more to offend thee, and make me love thee; treat me then as thou pleasest. Mary,

my hope, obtain for me these two graces; through thy intercession I hope to obtain them.

THIRD POINT.

How great, then, the folly of those who, for the miserable and transitory delights of this short life, expose themselves to the danger of an unhappy death, and afterwards of an unhappy eternity! O, how important is that last moment, that last opening of the mouth, the last closing of the scene! On it depends an eternity either of all delights or of all torments, a life of eternal happiness or everlasting woe. Let us consider that Jesus Christ submitted to a cruel and ignominious death in order to obtain for us the grace of a good death. It is that we may at that last moment die in the grace of God, that he gives us so many calls, so many lights, and that he admonishes us by so many threats.

Antisthenes, though a pagan, being asked what was the greatest blessing which man could receive in this world, answered — *a good death.* And what will a Christian say, who knows, by faith, that at the moment of death eternity begins, and that at that moment he shall be attached to one of two wheels, which shall either bring him to eternal joy, or drag him to everlasting torments? If two tickets, on one of which was written *Hell,* and on the other *Heaven,* were thrown into a lottery box, what care would you not take to draw that which would give you a right to paradise, and to avoid the other, by which you would win a place in hell! O God! how the hands of those unhappy men, who are condemned to risk their life on a game of hazard, tremble in casting the die on which their life or death depends! How great shall be your terror at the

approach of that last hour, when you shall say, "On this moment depends my life or death for eternity; on this depends whether I shall be forever happy or forever in despair"! St. Bernardine of Sienna relates, that at death a certain prince exclaimed, with trembling and dismay, "Behold, I have so many kingdoms and palaces in this world; but if I die this night, I know not what apartment shall be assigned to me."

Brother, if you believe that you must die — that there is an eternity — that you can die only once — and that, if you then err, your error shall be forever irreparable, why do you not resolve to begin at this moment to do all in your power to secure a good death? St. Andrew Avellino said with trembling, "Who knows what shall be my lot in the next life? Shall I be saved or damned?" The thought of the uncertainty of being damned or saved, filled St. Louis Bertrand with so much terror, that he could not sleep during the night. "Perhaps," he would say, "I shall be lost." And will not you, who have committed so many sins, tremble? O, hasten to apply a remedy in time; resolve to give yourself sincerely to God, and begin from this moment a life which, at the hour of death, will be to you a source, not of affliction, but of consolation. Give yourself up to prayer, frequent the sacraments, avoid all dangerous occasions, and, if necessary, leave the world, secure your eternal salvation, and be persuaded that, to insure eternal life, no security can be too great.

Affections and Prayers.

O my dear Savior! how great are my obligations to thee! How hast thou been able to bestow so many graces on so ungrateful a traitor as I have been? Thou hast created me; and in creating me

thou didst see the injuries which I would commit against thee. Thou hast redeemed me by dying for me; and then, too, thou sawest the ingratitude which I would be guilty of towards thee. Being placed in the world, I turned my back upon thee by my sins. My soul was dead and rotten, and thou hast restored me to life. I was blind, and thou hast enlightened me. I had lost thee, and thou hast enabled me to find thee. I was thine enemy, and thou hast made me thy friend. O God of mercy, make me feel the obligations which I owe thee, and make me weep over the offences which I have committed against thee. Ah! take vengeance on me by giving me a great sorrow for my sins. Do not chastise me by the privation of thy grace and love. O eternal Father, I abhor and detest, above all evils, the injuries I have done thee. Have mercy on me for the sake of Jesus Christ. Look at thy Son dead on the cross. May his blood flow upon me, and wash my soul. O King of my heart, *thy kingdom come.* I am resolved to banish every affection which is not for thee. I love thee above all things; come and reign in my heart with undivided sway. Grant that I may love thee, and love nothing but thee. I desire to please thee to the utmost of my ability, and to do thy will in all things, during the remainder of my life. Bless, O my Father, this my desire, and grant me the grace to keep myself always united to thee. All my affections I consecrate to thee, and from this day forward I wish to belong to thee alone, my treasure, my peace, my hope, my love, my all. I hope for all graces through the merits of thy Son. Mary, my queen and mother, assist me by thy intercession. Mother of God, pray for me.

FOURTH CONSIDERATION.

CERTAINTY OF DEATH.

"It is appointed unto men once to die." — Heb. ix. 27.

FIRST POINT.

The sentence of death has been written against all men; you are a man: you must die. "Our other goods and evils," says St. Augustine, "are uncertain; death alone is certain." It is uncertain whether the infant that is just born shall be poor or rich, whether he shall have good or bad health, whether he shall die in youth or in old age. But it is certain that he shall die. The stroke of death shall fall on all the nobles and monarchs of the earth. When death comes, there is no earthly power able to resist it. Fire, water, the sword, and the power of princes, may be resisted; but death cannot be resisted. "Resistitur," says St. Augustine, "ignibus, undis, ferro, resistitur regibus; venit mors: quis ei resistit?" — in Psal. xii. Bellucensis relates, that at the end of his life a certain king of France said, "Behold, with all my power, I cannot induce death to wait for me a single hour longer." When the term of life arrives, it is not deferred a single moment. "Thou hast appointed his bounds, which cannot be passed." — Job xiv. 5.

Dearly beloved reader, though you should live as many years as you expect, a day shall come, and on that day an hour, which shall be the last for you. For me, who am now writing, and for you, who read this little book, has been decreed the day and the moment when I shall no longer write, and you shall no longer read. "Who is the man that shall live,

and not see death?" — Ps. lxxxviii. 49. The sentence has been already passed. There never has been a man so foolish as to flatter himself that he should never die. What has happened to your forefathers shall also happen to you. Of the immense numbers that lived in this country in the beginning of the last century, there is not one now living. Even the princes and monarchs of the earth have changed their country; of them nothing now remains but a marble mausoleum and an elegant epitaph, which only serve to teach us, that of the great ones of this world nothing is left but a little dust shut up within a few stones. "Tell me," says Bernard, "where are the lovers of the world? Of them nothing has remained but ashes and worms."

Since our souls shall be eternal, we ought to procure, not a fortune which soon ends, but one which will be everlasting. What would it profit you to be happy here, (if it were possible for a soul to be happy without God,) if hereafter you should be miserable for all eternity? You have had great satisfaction in the house which you have built; but remember that you must soon leave it, and must go to rot in a grave. You have obtained a dignity which raises you above others; but death will come and reduce you to an equality with the poorest peasant.

Affections and Prayers.

Ah! unhappy me, who have spent so many years only in offending thee, O God of my soul. Behold, these years are already past: death is perhaps at hand; and what do I find but pains and remorse of conscience? O that I had always served thee, O my Lord! Fool that I have been! I have lived so many years on this earth, and, instead of acquiring merits for heaven, I have loaded my soul with debts

to the divine justice. Ah, my dear Redeemer, give me light and strength now to adjust my accounts. Death is perhaps not far off. I wish to prepare for that great moment, which will decide my eternal happiness or misery. I thank thee for having waited for me till now; and since thou hast given me time to repair the past, behold me, O my God; tell me what I am to do for thee. Dost thou wish me to weep over the offences I have offered to thee? I am sorry for them, and detest them with my whole soul. Dost thou wish me to spend the remaining years and days of my life in loving thee? I desire to do so, O God; I have even hitherto frequently resolved to do it; but I have violated my promises. O my Jesus, I will be no longer ungrateful for the great graces thou hast bestowed upon me. If I do not now change my life, how shall I be able at death to hope for pardon and for paradise? Behold, I now firmly resolve to begin to serve thee in earnest. But give me strength; do not abandon me. Thou didst not abandon me when I offended thee; I therefore hope more confidently for thy aid, now that I purpose to renounce all things in order to please thee. Accept me, then, as one of thy lovers, O God worthy of infinite love. Receive the traitor that now casts himself with sorrow at thy feet — that loves thee, and asks thy mercy. I love thee, O my Jesus; I love thee with my whole heart: I love thee more than myself. Behold, I am thine; dispose of me, and of all that I possess, as thou pleasest. Give me perseverance in obeying thy commands; give me thy love; and then do with me whatsoever thou wishest. Mary, my mother, my hope, my refuge, to thee I recommend myself, to thee I consign my soul; pray to Jesus for me.

SECOND POINT.

It is appointed. It is certain, then, that we are all condemned to death. We are born, says St. Cyprian, with the halter on the neck; every step we make brings us nearer to death. My brother, as your name has been one day inserted in the registry of baptisms, so it shall be one day written in the records of the dead. As, in speaking of your ancestors, you say, "God be merciful to my father, to my uncle, to my brother," so others shall say the same of you As you have heard the death-bell toll for many, so others shall hear it toll for you.

But what would you say if you saw a man, on his way to the place of execution, jesting, laughing, looking about in every direction, and thinking only of comedies, festivities, and amusements? And are not you now on your way to death? What are the objects of your thoughts? Behold in that grave your friends and relatives, on whom justice has been already executed. How great is the terror and dismay of a man condemned to die, when he beholds his companions hanging dead on the gibbet! Look, then, at these dead bodies. Each of them says to you, "Yesterday for me; to-day for thee." — Eccl. xxxviii. 23. The same is said to you by the pictures of your deceased relatives, by the memorandum-books, the houses, the beds, the garments which they have left.

To know that you must die — that after death you shall enjoy eternal glory, or suffer eternal torments — that on death depends your eternal happiness or eternal misery — and, with all this before your eyes, not to think of settling your accounts, and of adopting every means of securing a happy death, is surely the extreme of folly. We pity

those who meet with a sudden and unprovided death; why, then, do we not endeavor to be always prepared? We, too, may die suddenly and without preparation. But, sooner or later, with or without warning, whether we think or think not of it, we shall die; and every hour, every moment brings us nearer to our end, which shall be the infirmity that will banish us from this world.

In every age, houses, streets, and cities are filled with new people; the former inhabitants are shut up in the grave. As the days of life have ended for them, so a time will come, when neither I, nor you, nor any one alive, shall live any longer on this earth. "Days shall be formed and no one in them." — Ps. cxxxviii. 16. We shall all then be in eternity, which shall be for us either an eternal day of delights or an eternal night of torments. There is no medium; it is certain and of faith that one or the other will be our lot.

Affections and Prayers.

My beloved Redeemer, I would not dare to appear before thee, did I not see thee hanging on the cross, lacerated, despised, and lifeless, for the love of me. My ingratitude has been great; but thy mercy is still greater. My sins have been very grievous; but thy merits exceed their enormity. Thy wounds, thy blood, and thy death, are my hope. I deserved hell by my first sin; to that sin I have added so many other offences. And thou hast not only preserved my life, but thou hast also invited me to pardon, and hast offered me peace with so much mercy and so much love. How can I fear that thou wilt drive me away, now that I love thee and desire nothing but thy grace. Yes, my dear Lord, I love thee with my whole heart,

and I desire only to love thee. I love thee, and am sorry for having despised thee, not so much because I have deserved hell, as because I have offended thee, my God, who hast loved me so tenderly. O my Jesus, open to me the bosom of thy goodness; add mercies to mercies. Grant that I may be no longer ungrateful to thee; change my whole heart; grant that my heart, which once despised thy love, and exchanged it for the miserable delights of this earth, may now be entirely thine, and may burn with continual flames for thee. I hope to gain paradise, that I may always love thee. I cannot enjoy in that kingdom a place among the innocent — I must remain among the penitents; but though among these, I wish to love thee more than the innocent. For the glory of thy mercy, make all heaven behold so great a sinner inflamed with an ardent love. I resolve henceforth to be all thine, and to think only of loving thee. Assist me with thy light and grace to execute this desire, which thou in thy goodness hast inspired. O Mary, thou who art the mother of perseverance, obtain for me the grace to be faithful to this my promise.

THIRD POINT.

Death is certain. But, O God! this truth Christians know, this they believe and see: and how do they still live? As forgetful of death as if they were never to die. If after this life there were neither hell nor paradise, could they think less of them than they do at present? It is this forgetfulness that makes them lead so wicked a life. My brother, if you wish to live well, spend the remaining days of life with death before your eyes. "O mors, bonum est judicium tuum." Eccl. xli. 3. O,

how correct the judgments, how well directed the actions of the man whose judgments are formed, and whose conduct is regulated, in view of death! Consider the end of life, says St. Lawrence Justinian, and you shall love nothing in this world. "Consideratur vitæ terminus, et non erit in hoc mundo quid ametur." — *De Lingo Vitæ, cap.* v. "All that is in the world is the concupiscence of the eyes, and the pride of life." — 1 John ii. 16. All the goods of this earth are reduced to the pleasures of sense, to riches and honors. But all these are easily despised by the man who considers that he shall be soon reduced to ashes, and that he shall be soon buried under the earth, to be the food of worms.

And in reality it was at the sight of death that the saints despised all the goods of this earth. St. Charles Borromeo kept on his table a death's head, in order to have it always in view. Cardinal Baronius had inscribed on his ring the words "Memento mori." *Remember death.* The venerable P. Juvenal Ancina, bishop of Saluzzo, kept before him the skull of a dead man, on which was written, "What you are, I was; and what I am, you shall be." A holy hermit being asked, at death, how he could feel so glad and cheerful, said, "I have always kept death before my eyes; and, therefore, now that it has arrived, I see nothing new."

How great should be the folly of a traveller, who would think only of acquiring dignities and possessions in the countries through which he passes, and should reduce himself to the necessity of living miserably in his native land, where he must remain during his whole life! And is not he a fool, who seeks after happiness in this world, where he shall

remain only a few days, and exposes himself to the risk of being unhappy in the next, where he must live for eternity? We do not fix our affections on borrowed goods, because we know that they must soon be returned to the owner. All the goods of this earth are lent to us; it is folly to set our hearts on what we must soon quit. Death will strip us of them all. The acquisitions and fortunes of this world all terminate in an opening of the mouth, in a funeral, in a descent to the grave. The house which you have built for yourself you must soon give up to others. The grave will be the dwelling of your body till the day of judgment; from thence it shall go to paradise or to hell, where the soul shall have gone before.

Affections and Prayers.

Then, at death, all shall be at an end for me. I shall then find only the little I have done for thee, O my God. And what do I wait for? Do I wait till death come and find me as miserable and defiled with sin as I am at present? Were I now called to eternity, I should die with great disquietude on account of my past sins. No, my Jesus; I will not die so discontented. I thank thee for having given me time to weep over my iniquities and to love thee. I wish to begin from this moment. I am sorry from the bottom of my heart for having offended thee, O Sovereign Good, and I love thee above all things — I love thee more than my life. My Jesus, I give myself entirely to thee. From this moment I embrace and unite thee to my heart. I now consign my soul to thee. "Into thy hands I commend my spirit." I will not wait to give it to thee when that *proficiscere* shall announce my departure from this world. I will not wait till then to ask thee to save

me. *Jesu, sis mihi Jesus.* My Savior, save me now by granting me pardon and the grace of thy holy love. Who knows but this consideration which I have read, may be the last call which thou wilt give me, and the last mercy which thou wilt show me? Extend thy hand, O my love, and deliver me from the mire of my tepidity. Give me fervor, and make me do with great love all that thou demandest of me. Eternal Father, for the love of Jesus Christ, give me holy perseverance and the grace to love thee, and to love thee ardently, during the remainder of my life. O Mary, through the love which thou dost bear to thy Jesus, obtain for me two graces — perseverance and love.

FIFTH CONSIDERATION.

UNCERTAINTY OF THE HOUR OF DEATH.

"Be you then also ready; for at what hour you think not, the Son of man will come." — Luke xii. 40.

FIRST POINT.

It is certain that we shall die; but the time of death is uncertain. "Nothing," says Idiota, "is more certain than death; but nothing is more uncertain than the hour of death." My brother, God has already determined the year, the month, the day, the hour, and the moment when I and you shall leave this earth and go into eternity; but this time is unknown to us. To exhort us to be always prepared, Jesus Christ tells us that death shall come unawares, and like a thief in the night. "The day of the Lord shall so come as a thief in the night.-

1 Thess. v. 2. He now tells us to be always vigilant; because, when we least expect him, he will come to judge us. "At what hour you think not, the Son of man will come." — Luke xii. 40. St. Gregory says that for our good God conceals from us the hour of death, that we may always be prepared to die. "De morte incerti sumus, ut ad mortem semper parati inveniamur." Since, then, says St. Bernard, death may take away life at all times and in all places, we ought, if we wish to die well and save our souls, to live always in expectation of death. "Mors ubique te expectat: tu ubique eam expectabis."

All know that they shall die; but the misfortune is, that many view death at such a distance, that they lose sight of it. Even the old, the most decrepit, and the most sickly, flatter themselves that they shall live three or four years longer. But how many, I ask, have we known, even in our own times, to die suddenly, some sitting, some walking, some sleeping? It is certain that not one of these imagined that he should die so unprovidedly, and on the day on which the stroke of death fell upon him. I say, moreover, that of all who have gone to the other world during the present year, no one imagined that he should die and end his days this year. Few are the deaths which do not happen unexpectedly.

When, therefore, Christian soul, the devil tempts you to sin, by saying, "To-morrow you will go to confession," let your answer be, "How do I know but this shall be the last day of my life? If this hour, this moment, in which I would turn my back on God, were the last of my life, so that I should have no time for repentance, what would become of me for all eternity?" To how many poor sin-

ners has it happened, that in the act of feasting on the poison of sin, they were struck dead and sent to hell! "As fishes are taken with the hook," says Ecclesiastes, "so men are taken in the evil time." — Eccl. ix. 12. The evil time is that in which the sinner actually offends God. The devil tells you that this misfortune shall not happen to you; but you should say to him, in answer, "If it should happen to me, what shall be my lot forever?"

Affections and Prayers.

Lord, the place in which I ought to be at this moment, is not that in which I find myself, but hell, which I have so often merited by my sins. Infernus domus mea est. "*Hell is my house.*" St. Peter says, "The Lord waiteth patiently for your sake, not willing that any one should perish, but that all should return to penance." — 2 Peter iii. 9. Then thou hast had so much patience with me, and hast waited for me because thou wishest me not to be lost, but to return to thee by repentance. My God, I return to thee; I cast myself at thy feet, and supplicate mercy. "Have mercy on me, O God, according to thy great mercy." Lord, to pardon me requires a great and extraordinary act of mercy, because I offended thee after I had been favored with a special light. Other sinners also have offended thee; but they have not received the light which thou gavest to me. But, in spite of all my sinfulness and ingratitude, thou dost command me to repent of my sins, and to hope for pardon. Yes, my Redeemer, I am sorry with my whole heart for having offended thee, and I hope for pardon through the merits of thy passion. Thou, my Jesus, though innocent, hast wished to die like a criminal on a cross, and to shed all thy blood in order to wash away my sins.

"O sanguis innocentis, lava culpas pœnitentis." O blood of the innocent, wash away the sins of a penitent. O eternal Father, pardon me for the sake of Jesus Christ. Hear his prayers, now that he intercedes for me and advocates my cause. But it is not enough to receive pardon; I desire also, O God worthy of infinite love, the grace to love thee; I love thee, O Sovereign Good, and I offer thee henceforth my body, my soul, my liberty, and my will. I wish henceforth to avoid not only grievous, but also venial offences. I will fly from all evil occasions. *Lead us not into temptation.* For the love of Jesus Christ, preserve me from the occasions in which I would offend thee. *But deliver us from evil.* Deliver me from sin, and then chastise me as thou pleasest; I accept all infirmities, pains, and losses, which thou mayst be pleased to send me; it is enough for me not to lose thy grace and thy love. *Ask, and you shall receive.* Thou dost promise to grant whatsoever we ask; I ask these two graces — holy perseverance and the gift of thy love. O Mary, mother of mercy, pray for me; in thee I hope.

SECOND POINT.

The Lord wishes that we be not lost; and therefore, by the threat of chastisement, he unceasingly exhorts us to a change of life. "Except you will be converted, he will brandish his bow." — Ps. vii. 13. Behold, he says in another place, how many, because they would not cease to offend me, have met with a sudden death, when they least expected it, and lived in peace, secure of a life of many years! "For when they shall say, Peace and security, then shall sudden destruction come upon them." — 1 Thess. v. 3. Again he says, "Unless

you shall do penance, you shall all likewise perish.' — Luke xiii. 3. Why so many threats of chastisement before the execution of vengeance? It is because he wishes that we amend our lives, and thus avoid an unhappy death. He, says St. Augustine, who tells you to beware, does not wish to take away your life. "Non vult ferire, qui clamat tibi; observa." It is necessary, then, to prepare our accounts before the day of accounts arrives. Dearly beloved Christian, were you to die, and were your lot for eternity to be decided before night, would your accounts be ready? O, how much would you give to obtain from God another year or month, or even another day, to prepare for judgment! Why, then, do you not now, that God gives you this time, settle the accounts of your conscience? Perhaps it cannot happen, — that this shall be the last day for you! "Delay not to be converted to the Lord, and defer it not from day to day; for his wrath shall come on a sudden, and in the time of vengeance he will destroy thee."— Eccl. v. 8, 9. My brother, to save your soul, you must give up sin. If, then, you must renounce it at some time, why do you not abandon it at this moment?

"Si aliquando," says St. Augustine, "cur non modo?" Perhaps you are waiting till death arrives. But for obstinate sinners, the hour of death is the time, not of pardon, but of vengeance. "In tempore vindictæ disperdet te." In the time of vengeance he will destroy thee.

Should any one borrow from you a large sum of money, you take care to get legal security for it. Who knows, you say, what may happen? Why are you not equally careful about the salvation of your soul, which is of far greater importance to you than all the riches of the earth? When eternity is at

stake, why do you not say, "Who knows what may happen?" If you lose a sum of money, all is not lost; though in losing it your entire property should be lost, you may still have hopes of recovering it. But if at death you lose your soul, then you shall truly have lost all, and can never hope to regain it. You are careful to keep an exact account of all the goods you possess, lest, by dying suddenly, any of them might be lost; and, if you meet with a sudden death, and find yourself in enmity with God, what will become of your soul for all eternity?

Affections and Prayers.

Ah, my Redeemer, thou hast spent all thy blood, and hast given thy life in order to save my soul; and I have so often lost it by confidence in thy mercy. I have, then, so often abused thy goodness to offend thee. By doing so, I have deserved to be suddenly struck dead, and to be cast into hell. In a word, I have been engaged in a contest with thee. Thou hast treated me with mercy, and I offended thee; thou hast sought after me, and I fled away from thee; thou gavest me time to repair the evil I had done, and I employed that time in adding insults to insults. Lord, make me understand the injustice I have done thee, and the obligation by which I am bound to love thee. Ah, my Jesus! how could I be so dear to thee, who sought after me so often, when I chased thee away? How hast thou been able to bestow so many graces on one who has given thee so much displeasure? From this I see the ardor of thy desire to save me from perdition. I am sorry with my whole heart for having offended thee, O infinite goodness! Ah, receive this ungrateful sheep, that casts itself sorrowful at thy feet; receive it, and bind it on thy

shoulders, that I may never more fly away from thee. I will never again abandon thee. I wish to love thee; I wish to be thine; and, provided I belong to thee, I am content to suffer every pain. And what greater punishment can fall upon me, than to live without thy grace, to be separated from thee, who art my God, who hast created me and died for me? O accursed sins! what have you done? You have made me displease my Savior, who has loved me so tenderly. Ah, my Jesus, as thou hast died for me, so I ought to die for thee. Thou hast died through love for me, — I should die through sorrow for having despised thee. I accept death in whatever manner and at whatever time thou pleasest to send it. Hitherto I have not loved thee, or I have loved thee too little. I do not wish to die in this state. Ah, grant me a little more time, that I may love thee before I die. Change my heart; wound it; inflame it with thy holy love. Through that affection of charity which made thee die for me, grant me this favor. I love thee with my whole heart. My soul is enamored of thee. Do not permit me to lose thee. Give me holy perseverance; give me thy holy love. Most holy Mary, my refuge and my mother, perform the office of advocate in my behalf.

THIRD POINT.

Be you ready. The Lord does not tell us to prepare ourselves, but to be prepared, when death arrives. When death comes, it will be almost impossible, in that tempest and confusion, to tranquillize a conscience burdened with sin. This, reason tells us: this, God threatens, saying that then he will come, not to pardon, but to avenge, the contempt of his graces. "Revenge to me, I will re-

pay." — Rom. xii. 19. It is, says St. Augustine, a just punishment, that he who was unwilling, when he was able to save his soul, should not be able when he shall be willing. "Justa pœna est ut qui recta facere, cum posset, noluit, amittat posse cum velit." lib. iii. de Lib. Arbit. But you will say, "Perhaps I may still be converted and saved." Would you throw yourself into a deep well, saying, "Perhaps I may not be drowned?" O God! how sin blinds the understanding, and deprives the soul of reason! When there is question of the body, men speak rationally; but when the soul is at stake, they speak like fools.

My brother, who knows but this point, which you read, is the last warning which God shall send you? Let us immediately prepare for death, that it may not come upon us without giving us time to prepare for judgment. St. Augustine says that God conceals from us the last day of life, that we may be always prepared to die. "Latet ultimus dies, ut observentur omnes dies." Hom. xiii. St. Paul tells us that we must work out our salvation, not only with fear, but also with trembling. "With fear and trembling work out your salvation." — Phil. ii. 12. St. Antonine relates that a certain king of Sicily, to make one of his subjects understand the fear with which he sat on the throne, commanded him to sit at table with a sword suspended over him by a slender thread. The apprehension that the thread should give way, filled him with so much terror, that he could scarcely taste food. We are all in like danger; for the sword of death, on which our eternal salvation depends, may at each moment fall upon us.

There is question of eternity. "If the tree fall to the south or to the north, in which place

soever it shall fall, there shall it lie." — Eccl. xi. 3 If, when death comes, we are found in the grace of God, O, with what joy shall we say, "I have secured all; I can never again lose God; I shall be happy forever"! But, if death shall find the soul in sin, with what despair shall she exclaim, *Ergo erravimus!* — therefore I have erred; and for my error there shall be no remedy for all eternity. The fear of an unhappy eternity made the Venerable P. M Avila, apostle of Spain, say, when the news of death was brought to him, "O that I had a little more time to prepare for death!" This fear made the Abbot Agatho, who spent so many years in penance, say at death, "What shall become of me? Who can know the judgments of God?" St. Arsenius, too, trembled at death; and, being asked, by his disciples, why he was so much alarmed, he said, "My children, this fear is not new to me; I have had it always during my whole life." Above all, holy Job trembled when he said, "What shall I do when the Lord shall rise to judge? and when he shall examine, what shall I answer him?" — Job xxxi. 14.

Affections and Prayers.

Ah, my God! who has ever loved me more than thou hast? And whom have I despised and insulted more than I have insulted thee? O blood, O wounds of Jesus, you are my hope. Eternal Father, look not upon my sins, but look at the wounds of Jesus; behold thy Son dying through pain for my sake, and asking thee to pardon me. I repent, O my Creator, of having offended thee. I am sorry for it above all things. Thou hast created me that I might love thee; and I have lived as if thou hadst made me to offend thee. For the love

of Jesus Christ, pardon me and give me grace to love thee. I have hitherto resisted thy will, but I will resist no longer; I will do whatsoever thou commandest. Thou dost command me to detest the outrages I have offered to thee; behold, I detest them with my whole heart. Thou dost command me to resolve to offend thee no more; behold, I resolve to lose my life a thousand times, rather than forfeit thy grace. Thou dost command me to love thee with my whole heart; yes, with my whole heart I love thee, and I wish to love nothing else but thee. Thou shalt henceforth be my only beloved, my only love. From thee I ask, and from thee I hopē, for holy perseverance. For the love of Jesus Christ, grant that I may be always faithful to thee, and that I may always say to thee, with St. Bonaventure, "Unus est dilectus meus, unus est amor meus." My beloved is one, my love is one. I do not wish that my life be employed any longer in giving thee displeasure; I wish to spend it only in weeping over the offences I have committed against thee, and in loving thee. Mary, my mother, thou prayest for all who recommend themselves to thee, —pray to Jesus also for me.

SIXTH CONSIDERATION.

DEATH OF THE SINNER.

"When distress cometh upon them, they will seek for peace, and there shall be none. Trouble shall come upon trouble." —Ezec. vii. 25.

FIRST POINT.

At present sinners banish the remembrance and thought of death; and thus they seek after peace,

though they never find it, in the sinful life which they lead. But when they shall be found in the straits of death, on the point of entering into eternity, "they shall seek peace, and there shall be none." Then they shall not be able to fly from the torture of their sinful conscience. They shall seek peace; but what peace can be found by a soul loaded with sins which devour her like so many vipers? What peace can the sinner enjoy when he sees that he must in a few moments appear before the judgment-seat of Jesus Christ, whose law and friendship he has till then despised? "Trouble shall come upon trouble." The news of death, which has been already announced, the thought of being obliged to take leave of every thing in this world, the remorses of conscience, the time lost, the want of time at present, the rigor of the divine judgment, the unhappy eternity which awaits sinners, — all these things shall form a horrible tempest, which shall confuse the mind, shall increase diffidence; and thus, full of confusion and distrust, the dying sinner shall pass to the other world.

Trusting in the divine promise, Abraham, with great merit, hoped in God against human hope. "Who against hope believed in hope." — Rom. iv. 18. But sinners, with great demerit, hope falsely and to their own perdition, not only against hope, but also faith; because they despise the menaces of God against all who are obstinate in sin. They are afraid of a bad death, but they fear not to lead a wicked life. But who has assured them that they shall not be suddenly deprived of life by a thunderbolt, by apoplexy, or by the bursting of a blood-vessel? And were they at death even allowed time for repentance, who assures them that they shall sincerely return to God? To conquer bad habits, St. Augustine had to fight against them for

twelve years. How shall the dying man, who has always lived in sin, be able, in the midst of the pains, the stupefaction, and the confusion of death, to repent sincerely of all his past iniquities? I say *sincerely*, because it is not enough to say and to promise with the tongue; it is necessary to promise with the heart. O God! what terror and confusion shall seize the unhappy Christian who has led a careless life, when he shall find himself overwhelmed with sins, with the fears of judgment, of hell, and of eternity! O, what confusion shall these thoughts produce when the dying sinner shall find his reason gone, his mind darkened, and his whole frame assailed by the pains of approaching death! He will make his confession; he will promise, weep, and seek mercy from God, but without understanding what he does; and in this tempest of agitation, of remorse, of pains and terrors, he shall pass to the other life. "The people shall be troubled, and they shall pass."—Job xxxiv. 20. A certain author says that the prayers, the wailings, and promises of dying sinners, are like the tears and promises of a man assailed by an enemy who points a dagger to his throat to take away his life. Miserable the man who takes to his bed in enmity with God, and passes from the bed of sickness to eternity.

Affections and Prayers.

O wounds of Jesus, you are my hope. I should despair of the pardon of my sins, and of my eternal salvation, did I not behold you, the fountains of mercy and grace, through which a God has shed all his blood, to wash my soul from the sins which I have committed. I adore you, then, O holy wounds, and trust in you. I detest a thousand times, and curse those vile pleasures by which I

have displeased my Redeemer, and have miserably lost his friendship. Looking then at you, I raise up my hopes, and turn my affections to you. My dear Jesus, thou dost deserve to be loved by all men, and to be loved with their whole heart. I have so grievously offended thee, I have despised thy love; but notwithstanding my sinfulness, thou hast borne with me so long, and invited me to pardon with so much mercy. Ah, my Savior, do not permit me ever more to offend thee, and to merit my own damnation. O God! what torture should I feel in hell at the sight of thy blood and of the great mercies thou hast shown me. I love thee, and will always love thee. Give me holy perseverance. Detach my heart from all love which is not for thee, and confirm in me a true desire, a true resolution henceforth to love only thee, my sovereign good. O Mary, my mother, draw me to God, and obtain for me the grace to belong entirely to him before I die.

SECOND POINT.

The poor dying sinner shall be assailed, not by one, but by many causes of distress and anguish. On the one hand, the devils shall torment him. At death these horrid enemies exert all their strength to secure the perdition of the soul that is about to leave this world. They know that they have but little time to gain her, and that if they lose her at death, they shall lose her forever. "The devil is come down unto you having great wrath, knowing that he hath but a short time." — Apoc. xii. 12. The dying man shall be tempted, not by one, but by innumerable devils, who shall labor for his damnation. "Their house shall be filled with serpents." — Isa. xiii. 21. One shall say, "Fear not, you shall

recover." Another, "You have been deaf to the inspirations of God for so many years, and do you now expect that he will have mercy on you?" Another shall ask, "How can you make satisfaction for all the injuries you have done to the property and character of your neighbors?" Another, "Do you not see that your confessions have been null, that they have been made without sorrow or a purpose of amendment? How shall you now be able to repair them?"

On the other hand, the dying man shall see himself surrounded by his sins. "Evils," says David, "shall catch the unjust man unto destruction." — Ps. cxxxix. 12. "These sins," says St. Bernard, "like so many satellites, shall keep him in chains, and shall say to him, 'We are your works; we shall not desert you. We are your offspring; we will not leave you; we shall accompany you to the other world, and shall present ourselves with you to the Eternal Judge.'" The dying man will then wish to shake off such enemies; but, to get rid of them, he must detest them, he must return sincerely to God. His mind is darkened, and his heart hardened. "A hard heart shall fare evil at the last; and he that loveth danger shall perish in it." — Eccl. iii. 27. St. Bernard says that the man who has been obstinate in sin during life, will make efforts, but without success, to get out of the state of damnation; and that, overwhelmed by his own malice, he shall end his life in the same unhappy state. Having loved sin till death, he has also loved the danger of damnation. Hence the Lord shall justly permit him to perish in that danger in which he has voluntarily lived till the end of his life. St. Augustine says that he who is abandoned by sin before he abandons it, will scarcely detest it as he ought;

because what he will then do shall be done through necessity. "Qui prius a peccato relinquitur quam ipse relinquat, non libere sed quasi ex necessitate condemnat." Miserable the sinner that hardens his heart and resists the divine calls; "his heart shall be as hard as a stone and as firm as a smith's anvil." — Job xli. 15. Instead of yielding to, and being softened by, the graces and inspirations of God, the unhappy man becomes more obdurate, as the anvil is hardened by repeated strokes of the hammer. In punishment of his resistance to the divine calls, he shall find his heart in the same miserable state at the very hour of death, at the moment of passing into eternity. "A hard heart shall fare evil at the last." Sinners, says the Lord, you have for the love of creatures, turned your back upon me. "They have turned their back upon me, and not their face; and in the time of their affliction they shall say, Arise and deliver us. Where are the gods thou hast made thee? Let them arise and deliver thee." — Jer. ii. 27. They shall have recourse to God at death; but he will say to them, "Why do you invoke me now? Call on creatures to assist you, for they have been your gods." The Lord shall address them in this manner, because, in seeking him, they do not sincerely wish to be converted. St. Jerome says that he holds, and that he has learned from experience, that they who have to the end led a bad life, shall never die a good death. "Hoc teneo, hoc multiplici experientia didici quod ei non bonus est finis, cui mala semper vita fuit." — in Epis. Eusebii ad Dam.

Affections and Prayers.

My dear Savior, assist me; do not abandon me. I see my whole soul covered with the wounds of sin;

my passions attack me violently, my bad habits weigh me down. I cast myself at thy feet; have pity on me, and deliver me from so many evils. "In thee, O Lord, I have hoped; may I not be confounded forever." Do not suffer a soul that trusts in thee to be lost. "Deliver not up to beasts the souls that confess to thee." — Ps. lxxiii. 19. I am sorry for having offended thee, O infinite goodness! I have done evil; I confess my guilt. I wish to amend my life, whatsoever it may cost me. But if thou dost not help me by thy grace, I am lost. Receive, O my Jesus, the rebel who has so grievously outraged thy majesty. Remember that I have been purchased by thy blood and thy life. Through the merits, then, of thy passion and death, receive me into thy arms, and give me holy perseverance. I was lost; thou hast called me back; I will resist no longer; to thee I consecrate myself; bind me to thy love; and do not permit me ever more to lose thee by losing thy grace again. My Jesus, do not permit it. Mary, my queen, do not permit it; obtain for me death, and a thousand deaths, rather than that I should again forfeit the grace of thy Son.

THIRD POINT.

God unceasingly threatens sinners with an unhappy death. "Then they shall call upon me, and I will not hear." — Prov. i. 28. "Will God hear his cry when distress shall come upon him?" — Job xxvii. 9. "I also will laugh in your destruction, and will mock." — Prov. i. 26. According to St. Gregory, God laughs when he is unwilling to show mercy, ("Ridere Dei est nolle misereri.") "Revenge is mine, and I will repay them in *due* time." — Deut. xxxii. 35. The Lord pronounces the

same threats in so many other places; and sinners live in peace as securely as if God had certainly promised to give them, at death, pardon and paradise. It is true that at whatsoever hour the sinner is converted, God promises to pardon him. But he has not promised that sinners shall be converted at death; on the contrary, he has often protested that "they who live in sin shall die in sin." — John viii. 21. "*You shall die in your sins.*" — Ibid. 24. He has declared that they who shall seek him at death, shall not find him. "You shall seek me, and shall not find me." — John vii. 34. We must, therefore, seek God while he may be found. "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found." — Isa. lv. 6. A time shall come when it will not be in our power to find him. Poor blind sinners! they put off their conversion till death, when there shall be no more time for repentance. "The wicked," says Oleaster, "have never learned to do good unless when the time for doing good is no more." God wills the salvation of all; but he takes vengeance on obstinate sinners.

Should any man in the state of sin be seized with apoplexy and be deprived of his senses, what sentiments of compassion would be excited in all who should see him die without the sacraments and without signs of repentance! And how great should be their delight, if he recovered the use of his senses, asked for absolution, and made acts of sorrow for his sins! But is not he a fool, who has time to repent, and prefers to continue in sin? or who returns to sin, and exposes himself to the danger of being cut off by death without the sacraments, and without repentance? A sudden death excites terror in all; and still how many expose themselves to the danger of dying suddenly, and of dying in sin?

"Weight and balance are the judgments of the Lord." — Prov. xvi. 11. We keep no account of the graces which God bestows upon us; but he keeps an account of them, he measures them; and when he sees them despised to a certain degree, he then abandons the sinner in his sin, and takes him out of life in that unhappy state. Miserable the man who defers his conversion till death. "Pœnitentia," says St. Augustine, "quæ ab infirmo petitur infirma est." — Serm. lvii. de Temp. "The repentance which is sought from a sick man is infirm." St. Jerome teaches, that of a hundred thousand sinners who continue in sin till death, scarcely one shall be saved. "Vix de centum millibus quorum mala vita fuit, meretur in morte a Deo indulgentiam unus." — in Epis. Euseb. de Morte ejusd. St. Vincent Ferrer writes, that it is a greater miracle to bring such sinners to salvation, than to raise the dead to life. "Majus miraculum est quod male viventes faciant bonum finem, quam suscitare mortuos." — Serm. i. de Nativ. Virg. What sorrow, what repentance can be expected at death from the man who has loved sin till that moment? Bellarmine relates that when he exhorted to contrition a certain person whom he assisted at death, the dying man said that he did not know what was meant by contrition. The holy bishop endeavored to explain it to him; but he said, "*Father, I do not understand you; these things are too high for me.*" He died in that state, leaving, as the venerable cardinal has written, *sufficiently evident signs of his damnation.* St. Augustine says, that, by a just chastisement, the sinner who has forgotten God during life, shall forget himself at death. "Æquissime percutitur peccator ut moriens obliviscatur sui qui vivens oblitus est Dei." — Serm. x. de Sanct.

"Be not deceived," says the apostle; "God is not mocked. For what things a man shall sow, those also shall he reap. For he that soweth in his flesh, of the flesh also shall he reap corruption."—Gal. vi. 7. It would be a mockery of God to live in contempt of his laws, and afterwards to reap remuneration and eternal glory. But *God is not mocked.* What we sow in this life we reap in the next. For him who sows the forbidden pleasures of the flesh, nothing remains but corruption, misery, and eternal death.

Beloved Christian, what is said for others is also applicable to you. Tell me; if you were at the point of death, given over by the physicians, deprived of your senses, and in your last agony, with what fervor would you ask of God another month or week, to settle the accounts of your conscience! God at present gives you this time; thank him for it, and apply an immediate remedy to the evil you have done; adopt all the means of finding yourself in the grace of God when death shall come; for then there shall be no more time to acquire his friendship.

Affections and Prayers.

Ah, my God! who would have borne with me so patiently as thou hast? If thy goodness were not infinite, I would despair of pardon. But I have to deal with a God who has died for my salvation. Thou didst command me to hope, and I will hope. If my sins terrify and condemn me, thy merits and thy promises encourage me. Thou hast promised the life of thy grace to all who return to thee. "Return ye and live."—Ez. xviii. 32. Thou hast promised to embrace him who is converted to thee "Turn ye to me, and I will turn to you."—Zach.

i. 3. Thou hast said that thou knowest not how to despise an humble and contrite heart. "A contrite and humble heart, O God, thou wilt not despise." — Ps. l. 17. Behold me, O Lord; I return to thee; I acknowledge that I deserve a thousand hells; I am sorry for having offended thee. I firmly promise never again to offend thee voluntarily, and to love thee forever. Ah! do not suffer me any longer to be ungrateful to such unbounded goodness. O eternal Father, through the merits of the obedience of Jesus Christ, who died to obey thee, grant that I may till death be obedient to all thy wishes. I love thee, O Sovereign Good; and through the love which I bear thee, I desire to obey thee. Give me holy perseverance, give me thy love; I ask nothing more. Mary, my mother, intercede for me.

SEVENTH CONSIDERATION.

SENTIMENTS OF A DYING CHRISTIAN, WHO HAS BEEN CARELESS ABOUT THE DUTIES OF RELIGION, AND HAS THOUGHT BUT LITTLE OF DEATH.

"Take order with thy house; for thou shalt die, and shalt not live." — Isa. xxxviii. 1.

FIRST POINT.

IMAGINE yourself at the bedside of a negligent Christian, who is overpowered by sickness, and has but a few hours to live. Behold him oppressed by pains, by swoons, by suffocation, by want of breath, by cold sweats; his reason so impaired, that he feels but little, understands little, and can but speak

little. The greatest of all his miseries is, that, though at the point of death, instead of thinking of his soul, and of preparing accounts for eternity, he fixes all his thoughts on physicians, on the remedies by which he may be rescued from sickness, and from the pains which shall soon put an end to life. "Nihil aliud quam de se cogitare sufficiunt," says St. Lawrence Justinian, speaking of the condition of negligent Christians at the hour of death. They can think only of themselves. Surely his relatives and friends will admonish the dying Christian of his danger? No; there is not one among all his relatives and friends, who has the courage to announce to him the news of death, and to advise him to receive the last sacraments. Through fear of offending him, they all refuse to inform him of his danger. (O my God, from this moment I thank thee, that at death I shall, through thy grace, be assisted by my beloved brothers of my congregation, who shall then have no other interest than that of my eternal salvation, and shall all help me to die well.)

But though he is not admonished of his approaching death, the poor sick man, seeing the family in disorder, the medical consultations repeated, the remedies multiplied, frequent, and violent, is filled with confusion and terror. Assaulted by fears, remorses, and diffidences, he says within himself, "Perhaps the end of my days has arrived." But what shall be his feelings when he shall be told that death is at hand! "Take order with thy house; for thou shalt die, and shalt not live." What pain shall he feel in hearing Father Such-a-one say to him, "Your illness is mortal; it is necessary to receive the last sacraments, to unite yourself with God, and to prepare to bid farewell to the world!" "What!"

exclaims the sick man; "must I take leave of all, — of my house, my villa, my relatives, friends, conversations, plays, and amusements?" "Yes, you must take leave of all." The scrivener is already come, and pens this last farewell — *I bequeath such a thing and such a thing, etc.* And what does he bring with himself? Nothing but a miserable rag, which shall soon rot with him in the grave.

O, with what melancholy and agitation shall the dying man be seized at the sight of the tears of the domestics, at the silence of his friends, who have not courage to speak in his presence! But his greatest anguish shall arise from the remorses of his conscience, which in that tempest shall be rendered more sensible by the remembrance of the disorderly life he has till then led, in spite of so many calls and lights from God, of so many admonitions from spiritual fathers, and of so many resolutions made, but never executed, or afterwards neglected. He shall then say, "O, unhappy me! I have had so many lights from God, so much time to tranquillize my conscience, and have not done it. Behold, I am now arrived at the gate of death. What would it have cost me to have avoided such an occasion of sin, to have broken off such a friendship, to have frequented the tribunal of penance? Ah, very little; but, though they should have cost me much pain and labor, I ought to have submitted to every inconvenience in order to save my soul, which is of more importance to me than all the goods of this world. O, if I had put into execution the good resolutions which I had made on such an occasion, if I had continued the good works which I commenced at such a time, how happy should I now feel! But these things I have not done, and now there is no more time to do them." The sentiments of dy-

ing sinners who have neglected the care of their souls during life, are like those of the damned who mourn in hell over their sins as the cause of their sufferings, but mourn without fruit and without remedy.

Affections and Prayers.

Lord, if it were at this moment announced to me that my death was at hand, behold the painful sentiments which would torture my soul. I thank thee for giving me this light, and for giving me time to enter into myself. O my God, I will no longer fly from thee. Thou hast sought after me long enough. I have just reason to fear that thou wilt abandon me, if I now refuse to give myself to thee, and continue to resist thy calls. Thou hast given me a heart to love thee, and I have made so bad use of it! I have loved creatures, and have not loved thee, my Creator and Redeemer, who hast given thy life for the love of me. Instead of loving thee, how often have I offended, how often have I despised thee, and turned my back upon thee! I knew that by such a sin I insulted thee, and still I have committed it. My Jesus, I am sorry for all my sins; they displease me above all things. I wish to change my life. I renounce all the pleasures of the world in order to love and please thee, O God of my soul. Thou hast given me strong proofs of thy love. I too would wish before death to give thee some proof of my love. From this moment I accept all the infirmities, crosses, insults, and offences, which I shall receive from men; give me strength to submit to them with peace. I wish to bear them all for the love of thee. I love thee, O infinite Goodness! I love thee above every good. Increase my love, give me holy perseverance. Mary, my hope, pray to Jesus for me.

SECOND POINT.

O, how clearly are the truths of faith seen at the hour of death! But then they only serve to increase the anguish of the dying Christian who has led a bad life, particularly if he had been consecrated to God, and had greater facilities for serving him, more time for exercises of piety, more examples, and more inspirations. O God! what torture shall he feel in thinking and saying, "I have admonished others, and my life has been worse than theirs. I have left the world, and have cherished attachment to worldly pleasures and vanities." What remorse shall he feel in thinking that, with the lights which he had received from God, a pagan would become a saint! With what pain shall his soul be racked by the remembrance of having ridiculed in others certain practices of piety, as if they were weaknesses of mind; and of having praised certain maxims of the world, of self-esteem, or of self-love — such as, It is necessary to seek our own advancement; We ought to avoid suffering, and indulge in every amusement within our reach!

"*The desire of the wicked shall perish.*" — Ps. cxi. 10. How ardently shall we desire at death the time which we now squander away! In his dialogues, St. Gregory relates that a certain rich man, called Crysantius, who had led a wicked life, seeing at death the devils who came to carry him off, exclaimed, "Give me time, give me time till to-morrow." They replied, "O fool! do you now seek for time? You have had so much time, but have wasted it, and have spent it in committing sin; and now you seek for time. Time is now no more.'

The unhappy man continued to cry out and call for assistance. To his son Maximus, a monk, who was present, he said, "O my son, assist me; O Maximus, come to my aid." With his face on fire, he sprang in a furious manner from one side of the bed to the other; and in that state of agitation, screaming aloud, like one in despair, he breathed forth his unhappy soul.

Alas! during this life, these fools love their folly; but at death, they open their eyes, and confess that they have been fools. But this only serves to increase their diffidence of repairing past evils; and dying in this state, they leave their salvation very uncertain. My brother, now that you read this point, I imagine that you too say, "This is indeed true." But if this is true, your folly and misfortune shall be still greater, if, after knowing these truths during life, you neglect to apply a remedy in time. This very point which you have read, shall be a sword of sorrow for you at death.

Since, then, you now have time to avoid a death so full of terror, begin instantly to repair the past; do not wait for that time in which you can make but little preparation for judgment. Do not wait either for another month, or for another week. Perhaps this light, which God in his mercy gives you now, may be the last light and the last call for you. It is folly to be unwilling to think of death, which is certain, and on which eternity depends; but it would be still greater folly to reflect on it, and not prepare for judgment. Make now the reflections and resolutions which you would then make: they may be made now with profit — then without fruit; now with confidence of saving your soul — then with diffidence of your salvation. A gentleman who was about to take leave of the court

of Charles the Fifth, to live only to God, was asked by the emperor why he thought of quitting the court. The gentleman answered, "To secure salvation, it is necessary that some time spent in penitential works should intervene between a disorderly life and death."

Affections and Prayers.

O my God, I will no longer abuse thy mercy. I thank thee for the light thou now givest me, and I promise to change my life. I see that thou canst not bear with me any longer. I will not wait till thou either send me to hell, or abandon me to a wicked life, which should be a greater punishment than death itself. Behold, I cast myself at thy feet; receive me into favor. I do not deserve thy grace; but thou hast said, "The wickedness of the wicked shall not hurt him, in whatsoever day he shall turn from his wickedness." — Ezec. xxxiii. 12. If, then, O my Jesus, I have hitherto offended thy infinite goodness, I now repent with my whole heart, and hope for pardon. I will say with St. Anselm, "Ah, since thou hast redeemed me by thy blood, do not permit me to be lost on account of my sins." Look not on my ingratitude; but have regard to the love which made thee die for me. If I have lost thy grace, thou hast not lost the power of restoring it to me. Have mercy on me, then, O my dear Redeemer. Pardon me, and give me grace to love thee; for I purpose henceforth to love nothing but thee. Among so many possible creatures, thou hast chosen me to love thee. I make choice of thee, O Sovereign Good, to love thee above every good. Thou goest before me with thy cross: I am willing to follow thee with the cross which thou wilt give me to carry. I embrace every

mortification and every pain which shall come from thee. Do not deprive me of thy grace, and I am content. Mary, my hope, obtain for me, from God, perseverance and the grace to love him; and I ask nothing more.

THIRD POINT.

The dying man who has neglected the salvation of his soul, shall find thorns in every thing that shall be presented to him; — thorns in the remembrance of past amusements, punctilios, and pomps; thorns in the friends who shall visit him, and in whatever their presence shall bring before his mind; thorns in the spiritual fathers who shall assist him in turn; thorns in the sacraments of penance, eucharist, and extreme unction, which he must receive; thorns even in the crucifix which shall be placed before him. In that sacred image he shall read his want of correspondence to the love of a God who died for his salvation.

"O, fool that I have been!" the poor sick man shall say. "With the lights and opportunities which God has given me, I could have become a saint. I could have led a life of happiness in the grace of God; and after so many years which he gave me, what do I find but torments, diffidences, fears, remorses of conscience, and accounts to render to God? I shall scarcely save my soul." And when shall he say this? When the oil in the lamp is on the point of being consumed, and the scene of this world is about to close forever; when he finds himself in view of two eternities, one happy, the other miserable; when he is near that last opening of the mouth, on which depends his being always in bliss, or always in despair, as long as God shall be

God. What would he then give for another year or month, or even for another week, with the perfect use of his faculties! In the stupefaction, oppression of the chest, and difficulty of breathing, under which he then labors, he can do nothing: he is incapable of reflection, or of applying his mind to the performance of any good act; he is, as it were, shut up in a dark pit of confusion, where he can see nothing but the ruin which threatens him, and which he feels himself unable to avert. He would wish for time; but the assisting priest shall say to him, "*Proficiscere;* — adjust your accounts as well as you can in the few moments that remain, and depart. Do you not know that death waits for no one — respects no one?"

O, with what dismay shall he then think and say, "This morning I am alive; this evening I shall probably be dead! To-day I am in this room; to-morrow I shall be in the grave! And where shall my soul be found?" With what terror shall he be seized when he shall see the death candle prepared; when he shall hear his relatives ordered to withdraw from his apartment, and to return to it no more; when his sight shall begin to grow dim! Finally, how great shall be his alarm and confusion, when he shall see that, because death is at hand, the candle is lighted! O candle, O candle, how many truths shall you then unfold! How different shall you make things appear then from what they appear at present! O, how clearly shall you show to the dying sinner, that all the goods of this world are vanities, folly, and lies! But of what use is it to understand these truths, when the time of salvation is over?

Affections and Prayers.

Ah, my God, thou willest not my death, but that I be converted and live. I thank thee for having waited for me till now, and I thank thee for the light which thou givest me at this moment. I know the error I have committed in preferring to thy friendship the vile and miserable goods for which I have despised thee. I repent and am sorry with my whole heart for having done thee so great an injury. Ah! do not cease, during the remainder of my life, to assist me by thy light and grace to know and to do all that I ought to do in order to amend my life. What will it profit me to know these truths when I shall be deprived of the time in which they may be reduced to practice? "Deliver not up to beasts the souls that confess to thee." When the devil shall tempt me to offend thee again, ah! I entreat thee, my Jesus, through the merits of thy passion, to stretch forth thy hand, and to preserve me from falling into sin, and from becoming again the slave of my enemies. Grant that in all temptations I may have recourse to thee, and that I may not cease to recommend myself to thee as long as the temptations continue. Thy blood is my hope, and thy goodness is my love. I love thee, my God worthy of infinite love; grant that I may always love thee. Make known to me the things from which I ought to detach my heart, that I may be entirely thine: I wish to detach my heart from them; but give me strength to execute this desire. O queen of heaven, O mother of God, pray for me a sinner. Obtain for me the grace that in all temptations, I may never omit to have recourse to Jesus and to thee, who, by thy intercession, preserve from falling into sin all who invoke thee.

EIGHTH CONSIDERATION.

DEATH OF THE JUST.

"Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints." — Ps. cxv. 15.

FIRST POINT.

Considered according to the senses, death excites fear and terror; but, viewed with the eyes of faith, it is consoling and desirable. To sinners it appears full of terror; but to the saints it is amiable and precious. "It is precious," says St. Bernard, "as the end of labors, the consummation of victory, the gate of life." — Trans. Malach. *Finis laborum*, it is the end of toils and labor. "Man," says Job, "born of a woman, living for a short time, is filled with many miseries." — Job xiv. 1. Behold a picture of our life; it is short, and all full of miseries, of infirmities, of fears, and passions. "What," says Seneca, "do worldlings who desire a long life, seek, but a continuation of torments?" "Tanquam vita petitur supplicii mora." — Ep. ci. "What," says St. Augustine, "is a prolongation of life, but a prolongation of suffering?" "Quid est diu vivere, nisi diu torqueri?" — Serm. xvii., de Verb Domin. Yes; for, as St. Ambrose tells us, the present life is given us, not for repose, but that we may labor, and by our toils, merit eternal glory. "Hæc vita homini non ad quietem data est, sed ad laborem." — Serm. xliii. Hence Tertullian has justly said, that when God abridges life, he abridges pain. "Longum Deus adimit tormentum cum vitam concedit brevet." Hence, though man has been condemned to death in punishment of sin, still, the miseries of this life are so great, that, ac-

cording to St. Ambrose, death appears to be a remedy and relief, rather than a chastisement. "Ut mors remedium videatur esse, non pœna." God pronounces happy all who die in his grace; because they terminate their labors and go to repose. "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord. From henceforth now, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors." — Apoc. xiv. 13.

The torments which afflict sinners at death, do not disturb the peace of the saints. "The souls of the just are in the hands of God, and the torment of death shall not touch them." Wis. iii. 1 That *proficiscere* which is so full of terror to worldlings does not alarm the saints. The just man is not afflicted at the thought of being obliged to take leave of the goods of the earth; for he has always kept his heart detached from them. During life he has constantly said to the Lord, "Thou art the God of my heart, and the God that is my portion forever." Happy you, said the apostle to his disciples, who have been robbed of your goods for the sake of Jesus Christ. "You took with joy the being stripped of your goods, knowing that you have a better and a lasting substance." Heb. x. 34. The saint is not afflicted at bidding an eternal farewell to honors; for he always hated them, and considered them to be what they really are — smoke and vanity. He is not afflicted in leaving relatives; for he loved them only in God; and at death he recommends them to his heavenly Father, who loves them more than he does; and having a secure confidence of salvation, he expects to be better able to assist them from heaven, than on this earth. In a word, he who has constantly said during life, "*My God and my all,*" continues to repeat it with greater consolation and greater tenderness at the hour of death.

He who dies loving God is not disturbed by the pains of death; but, seeing that he is now at the end of life, and that he has no more time to suffer for God, or to offer him other proofs of his love, he accepts these pains with joy. With affection and peace he offers to God these last remains of life, and feels consoled in uniting the sacrifice of his death with the sacrifice which Jesus Christ offered for him on the cross to his eternal Father. Thus he dies happily, saying, "In peace in the self-same I will sleep and I will rest." — Ps. iv. O, how great the peace of the Christian who dies abandoned and reposing in the arms of Jesus Christ, who has loved us to death, and has condescended to suffer so cruel a death in order to obtain for us a death full of sweetness and consolation!

Affections and Prayers.

O, my beloved Jesus, who, to obtain for me a happy death, hast freely submitted to so painful a death on Calvary, when shall I see thee? The first time I shall behold thee, I shall see thee as my judge in the very place in which I shall expire. What shall I then say? What wilt thou say to me? I will not wait till that moment to think of what I shall say; I will meditate on it now. I will say to thee, "My Redeemer, thou art the God who hast died for me. I have hitherto offended thee; I have been ungrateful to thee: I did not deserve pardon; but afterwards, assisted by thy grace, I have entered into myself, and, during the remainder of my life, I have bewailed my sins; and thou hast pardoned me. Pardon me again, now that I am at thy feet, and give me a general absolution of all my sins. I did not deserve ever again to love thee, because I have despised thy love; but thou in thy mercy hast

drawn my heart to thee, so that, if I have not loved thee as much as thou dost deserve, I have at least loved thee above all things, and have left all to please thee. I see that paradise and the possession of thy divinity in thy kingdom, is too much for me; but I cannot live at a distance from thee, now especially, after thou hast shown me thy amiable and beautiful countenance. I therefore seek for paradise, not to enjoy greater delights, but to love thee more perfectly. Send me to purgatory as long as thou pleasest. Defiled as I am at present, I do not wish to enter into the land of purity, and to see myself among those pure souls. Send me to be purified; but do not banish me forever from thy presence. I shall be content to be one day, whenever thou pleasest, called to paradise, to sing thy mercies for all eternity. Ah, my beloved Judge! raise thy hand and bless me; tell me that I am thine, and that thou art and shalt be forever mine. I will always love thee, and thou wilt forever love me. Behold, I go to a distance from thee; I go to fire; but I go in peace, because I go to love thee, my Redeemer, my God, my all. I am content to go; but during my absence from thee, the greatest of my pains will consist in being at a distance from thee. I go, O Lord, to count the moments that shall elapse before thou shalt call me. Have mercy on a soul that loves thee with all her power, and that sighs to see thee, that she may love thee better."

This I hope, O my Jesus, to say to thee at death. I entreat thee to give me the grace to live in such a manner, that I may then say to thee what I have now meditated. Give me holy perseverance, give me thy love. Assist me, O Mary, mother of God; pray to Jesus for me.

SECOND POINT.

"God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and death shall be no more." — Apoc. xxi. 4. Then, at death, the Lord shall wipe away from the eyes of his servants all the tears they have shed in this world, where they live in the midst of pains, of fears, of dangers, and combats with hell. The greatest consolation which a soul that has loved God shall experience in hearing the news of death, will arise from the thought that she shall soon be delivered from the many dangers of offending God to which she is exposed in this life, from so many troubles of conscience, and from so many temptations of the devil. The present life is an unceasing warfare with hell, in which we are in continual danger of losing our souls and God. St. Ambrose says that in this life *we walk among snares;* we walk continually amid the snares of enemies, who lie in wait to deprive us of the life of grace. It was this danger that made St. Peter of Alcantara say at death to a religious who, in attending the saint, accidentally touched him, "*Brother, remove, remove from me; for I am still alive, and am still in danger of being lost.*" The thought of being freed by death from the danger of sin, consoled St. Teresa, and made her rejoice, as often as she heard the clock strike, that another hour of the combat was past. Hence she would say, "*In each moment of life I may sin and lose God.*" Hence the news of approaching death filled the saints with consolation; because they knew that their struggles and danger were soon to have an end, and that they should soon be in secure possession of that happy lot in which they could never more lose God.

It is related in the lives of the fathers, that one of them, who was very old, when dying, smiled while the others wept. Being asked why he smiled, he said, Why do you weep at seeing me go to rest? "Ex labore ad requiem vado, et vos ploratis?" Likewise St. Catharine of Sienna, in her last moments, said, "*Rejoice with me; for I quit this land of pains, and go to a place of peace.*" "If," says St. Cyprian, "you lived in a house whose walls, and roof, and floors, were tottering, and threatened destruction, how ardently would you desire to fly from it!" In this life every thing menaces the ruin of the soul; the world, hell, the passions, the rebellious senses, all draw us to sin and eternal death. "Who," exclaimed the apostle, "shall deliver me from the body of this death?" — Rom. vii. 24. O, how great shall be the joy of the soul in hearing these words! "Come from Lebanus, my spouse, from the dens of the lions." — Cant. iv. 8. Come, my spouse, depart from that land of tears, from the dens of lions who seek to devour you, and to rob you of the divine grace. Hence St. Paul, panting after death, said that Jesus Christ was his only life; and therefore he esteemed death his greatest gain, because by death he acquired that life which never ends. "To me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain." — Phil. i. 21.

In taking a soul, while she is in the state of grace, out of this world, where she may change her will and lose his friendship, God bestows on her a great favor. "He was taken away lest wickedness should alter his understanding." — Wis. iv. 11. Happy in this life is the man that lives in union with God; but, as the sailor is not secure until he has arrived at the port and escaped the tempest, so the soul cannot enjoy complete happiness until she

has left this world in the grace of God. "Praise," says St. Ambrose, "the felicity of the sailor; but not until he has reached the port." Now, if, at his approach to the port, the sailor rejoices, how much greater ought to be the joy and gladness of a Christian who is at the point of securing eternal salvation!

Moreover, it is impossible in this life to avoid all venial sins. "For," says the Holy Ghost, "a just man shall fall seven times." — Prov. xxiv. 16. He who quits this life ceases to offend God. "For," says St. Ambrose, "what is death but the burial of vices?" — De Bono Mort., c. iv. This consideration makes the souls that love God long for death. The Venerable Vincent Caraffa consoled himself at death, saying, "By ceasing to live, I cease forever to offend God." And St. Ambrose said, "Quid vitam istam desideramus, in qua quanto diutius quis fuerit, tanto majori oneratur sarcina peccatorum." Why do we desire this life, in which the longer we live, the more we are loaded with sins? He who dies in the grace of God, can never more offend him. "Mortuus nescit peccare," says the same holy doctor. Hence the Lord praises the dead more than any man living, though he be a saint. "And I praise the dead rather than the living." — Eccl. iv. 2. A certain spiritual man gave directions that the person who should bring him the news of death, should say, "Console yourself; for the time has arrived when you shall no longer offend God."

Affections and Prayers.

"Into thy hands I commend my spirit; thou hast redeemed me, O Lord, the God of truth." — Ps. xxx. Ah, my sweet Redeemer! what should become of me if thou had deprived me of life when I was far

from thee? I should now be in hell, where I could never love thee. I thank thee for not having abandoned me, and for having bestowed on me so many great graces in order to gain my heart. I am sorry for having offended thee. I love thee above all things. Ah! I entreat thee to make me always sensible of the evil I have done in despising thee, and of the love which thy infinite goodness merits. I love thee; and I desire to die soon, if such be thy will, that I may be freed from the danger of ever again losing thy grace, and that I may be secure of loving thee forever. Ah, my beloved Jesus! during these remaining years of my life, give me strength to do something for thee before I die. Give me strength against all temptations, and against my passions, but particularly against the passion which has hitherto most violently drawn me to sin. Give me patience in all infirmities, and under all the injuries which I shall receive from men. I now, for the love of thee, pardon all who have shown me any contempt, and I beg of thee to bestow upon them the graces which they stand in need of. Give me strength to be more diligent in avoiding even venial faults, about which I have been hitherto negligent. My Savior, assist me. I hope for all graces through thy merits. O Mary, my mother and my hope, I place unbounded confidence in thee.

THIRD POINT.

Death is not only the end of labors, but it is also the gate of life. "Finis laborum, vitæ janua," says St. Bernard. He who wishes to see God must necessarily pass through this gate. "This is the gate of the Lord: the just shall enter into it." — Ps. cxvii.

20. St. Jerome entreated death to open his gates to him. "Aperi mihi, soror mea." Death, my sister, if you do not open the door to me, I cannot enter to enjoy my Lord. Seeing in his house a picture in which death was represented with a knife in the hand, St. Charles Borromeo sent for a painter, and ordered him to substitute for the knife a key of gold, in order that he might be more and more inflamed with a desire of death, which opens paradise, and admits us to the vision of God.

"If," says St. John Chrysostom, "a king had prepared for one of his subjects apartments in his own palace, but for the present obliged him to live in a tent, how ardently would the vassal sigh for the day on which he should leave the tent to enter into the palace!" In this life the soul, being in the body, is as it were confined in a prison, which she must leave in order to enter the celestial palace. Hence David prayed to the Lord to bring his soul out of prison. "Bring my soul out of prison, that I may praise thy name."—Ps. cxli. 8. When the holy Simeon held the infant Jesus in his arms, he asked no other grace than to be delivered from the prison of the present life. "Now thou dost dismiss thy servant, O Lord."—Luke ii. 29. "As if detained by necessity, he," says St. Ambrose, "begs to be dismissed." The apostle desired the same grace when he said, "I am straitened, having a desire to be dissolved, and to be with Christ."—Phil. i.

How great was the joy of the cup-bearer of Pharaoh, when he heard from Joseph that he should be soon rescued from prison, and restored to his situation! And will not a soul that loves God exult with gladness at hearing that she shall soon be released from the prison of this earth, and go to enjoy God? "While we are in the body, we are absent

from the Lord." — 2 Cor. v. 6. While the soul is united to the body, she is at a distance from the vision of God, as if in a strange land, and excluded from her true country. Hence, according to St. Bruno, the departure of the soul from the body should not be called death, but the beginning of life. "Mors dicenda non est, sed vitæ principium."

Hence the death of the saints is called their birthday; because at death they are born to that life of bliss which shall never end. "Non est justis mors, sed translatio," says St. Athanasius. To the just, death is only a passage to eternal life. O amiable death, says St. Augustine, who will not desire thee, who art the end of evils, the close of toils, the beginning of everlasting repose? "O mors desiderabilis malorum finis, laboris clausula, quietis principium!" Hence, the holy doctor frequently prayed for death, that he might see God "Eja moriar, Domine, ut te videam."

The sinner, as St. Cyprian says, has just reason to fear death; because he shall pass from temporal to eternal death. "Mori timeat qui ad secundum mortem, de hac morte transibit." But he who is in the state of grace, and hopes to pass from death to life, fears not death. In the life of St. John the Almoner, we read that a certain rich man recommended to the prayers of the saint an only son, and gave the saint a large sum of money to be distributed in alms, for the purpose of obtaining from God a long life for his son. The son died soon after; but when the father complained of his death, God sent an angel to say to him, "You sought for your son a long life; he now enjoys eternal life in heaven." This is, as was promised by the prophet Osee, the grace which Jesus Christ merited for us. "O death, I shall be thy death." — Osee xiii. 14.

By dying for us, Jesus has changed death into life When Pionius the Martyr was brought to the stake, he was asked, by those who conducted him, how he could go to death with so much joy. "You err," replied the saint; "I go not to death, but to life." — Ap. Eus. lib. iv. cap. xiv. Thus also the mother of the young St. Symphorian exhorted him to martyrdom. "My son," said she, "life is not taken away from you; it is only exchanged for a better one."

Affections and Prayers.

O God of my soul, I have hitherto dishonored thee by turning my back upon thee; but thy Son has honored thee by offering to thee the sacrifice of his life on the cross. Through the honor which thy beloved Son has given thee, pardon the dishonor which I have done thee. I am sorry, O Sovereign Good, for having offended thee; and I promise henceforth to love nothing but thee. From thee I hope for salvation; whatever good is in me at present is the fruit of thy grace; to thee I ascribe it all. "Gratia Dei sum id quod sum." If I have hitherto dishonored thee, I hope to honor thee for eternity by blessing and praising thy mercy forever. I feel a great desire to love thee. This thou hast given me; I thank thee for it, O my Love. Continue, continue the aid which thou hast begun to give me. I hope to be henceforth thine, and entirely thine. And what greater pleasure can I enjoy, than that of pleasing thee, my Lord, who art so amiable, and who hast loved me so tenderly? O my God, I ask only love, love, love; and I hope always to ask of thee love, love, until, dying in thy love, I reach the kingdom of love, where, without evermore asking it, I shall be full of love, and never for

a single moment cease to love thee for all eternity, and with all my strength. Mary, my mother, who lovest thy God so intensely, and who dost desire so vehemently to see him loved, obtain for me the grace to love him ardently in this life, that I may love him ardently forever in the next.

NINTH CONSIDERATION

PEACE OF THE JUST AT DEATH.

"The souls of the just are in the hands of God, and the torment of death shall not touch them. In the sight of the unwise they seemed to die; .... but they are in peace." — Wis. iii. 1, &c.

FIRST POINT.

The souls of the just are in the hands of God. If God holds fast in his hands the souls of the just, who can snatch them from him? It is true that hell does not cease to tempt and attack even the saints at the hour of death; but it is also true that God does not cease to assist, and to multiply helps to his faithful servants, whenever their danger is increased. "There," says St. Ambrose, "there is greater aid, where there is greater peril, because God is a helper in due time." — Ad Jos. c. v. The servant of Eliseus was struck with terror when he saw the city encompassed with enemies; but the saint inspired him with courage, saying, "Fear not; for there are more with us than with them." — 4 Kings vi. 16. He then showed him an army of angels sent by God to defend the city. The devil shall come to tempt the dying Christian; but his angel-guardian shall come to strengthen him; his

holy advocates shall come; St. Michael, whom God has appointed to defend his faithful servants in their last combat with hell, shall come; the divine mother shall come to chase away the devils, and to protect her servant; above all, Jesus Christ shall come to guard against every temptation of hell the innocent or penitent sheep for whose salvation he has given his life. He will give her all the confidence and strength which she shall stand in need of in that last struggle with her enemies. Hence, full of courage, she shall say, "The Lord became my helper." — Ps. xxix. 11. "The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?" — Ps. xxvi. 1. God, says Origen, is more solicitous for our salvation, than the devil is for our perdition; for the Lord loves our souls far more than the devil hates them. "Major illi cura est, ut nos ad salutem pertrahat quam diabolo ut nos ad damnationem impellat." — Hom. xx. in lib. Num.

God is faithful, says the apostle; he does not permit us to be tempted above our strength. "God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that which you are able." — 1 Cor. x. 13. But you will say, "Many saints have died with great fear of being lost." I answer, "We have but few examples of persons who, after leading a holy life, died with fears of their eternal salvation." Belluacensis says that, to purify them at the hour of death from some defect, God sometimes permits holy souls to be disturbed by such fears. "Justi quandoque dure moriendo purgantur in hoc mundo." But generally the servants of God have died with a joyful countenance. At death the judgment of God excites fear in all; but if sinners pass from terror to despair, the saints rise from fear to confidence. St. Antonine relates that, in a severe illness, St. Bernard

trembled through fear of judgment, and was tempted to diffidence. But thinking on the merits of Jesus Christ, he drove away all fear, saying to his Savior, Your wounds are my merits — "Vulnera tua, merita mea." St. Hilarion also was seized with fear; but he said, "Go forth, my soul; what do you fear? For near seventy years you have served Christ; and are you now afraid of death?" As if he said, "My soul, what do you fear? Have you not served a God who is faithful, and knows not how to abandon at death the Christian who has been faithful to him during life?" Father Joseph Scamacca, of the Society of Jesus, being asked if in dying he felt confidence in God, said, "Have I served Mahomet, that I should now doubt of the goodness of my God, or of his desire to save me?"

Should the thought of having offended God at some part of our life molest us at death, let us remember that he has protested that he forgets the iniquities of all penitent sinners. "If the wicked do penance, ... I will not remember all his iniquities." — Ezek. xviii. 21, 22. But you may ask, "How can I be secure of having received pardon from God?" St. Basil asks the same question: "How can any one be certain that God has forgiven his sins?" "He can be certain of pardon," answers the saint, "if he say, I have hated and abhorred iniquity." — in Reg. inter. xii. He who detests sin, can rest secure of having obtained pardon from God. The heart of man cannot exist without loving some object; it must love creatures or God. If it loves not creatures, it loves God. And who are they that love God? All who observe his commands. "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me." — John xiv 21. He, then, who dies in the observance of the

commandments, dies in the love of God; and he that loves, fears not. "Charity casteth out fear." —1 John iv. 18.

Affections and Prayers.

Ah, my Jesus! when shall the day arrive, on which I can say, "My God, I can never lose thee"? When shall I see thee face to face, and be secure of loving thee with all my strength for eternity? Ah, my Sovereign Good, my only Love, as long as I shall have life, I shall be in danger of offending thee and of losing thy grace. There has been an unhappy time when I did not love thee, but, on the contrary, despised thy love. I am sorry for it with my whole soul, and hope that thou hast already pardoned me. I now love thee with my whole heart, and desire to do all in my power to love and please thee. But I am still in danger of refusing thee my love, and of again turning my back upon thee. Ah, my Jesus, my life and my treasure, do not permit it. Should this misfortune ever happen to me, take me this moment out of life by the most cruel of deaths; I am content to suffer such a death, and I entreat thee to send me such a death, sooner than permit me ever to cease to love thee. Eternal Father, for the love of Jesus Christ do not abandon me to so great an evil. Chastise me as thou wishest; I deserve and accept any chastisement thou dost please to inflict upon me; but preserve me from the punishment of seeing myself deprived of thy grace and of thy love. My Jesus, recommend me to thy Father. Mary, my mother, recommend me to thy Son; obtain for me perseverance in his friendship, and the grace to love him; and then do with me what thou pleasest.

SECOND POINT.

"The souls of the just are in the hands of God, and the torment of death shall not touch them. In the sight of the unwise, they seemed to die; .... but they are in peace." — Wis. iii. 1, &c. In the eyes of the unwise, the servants of God appear to die, as worldlings do, in sorrow and with reluctance. But God knows well how to console his children in their last moments; and, even in the midst of the pains of death, he infuses into their souls certain sweetnesses, as foretastes of paradise, which he will soon bestow upon them. As they who die in sin begin to experience on the bed of death certain foretastes of hell, certain remorses, terrors, and fits of despair, so, on the other hand, the saints, by the frequent acts of divine love which they then make, by their ardent desire and firm hope of soon possessing God, begin to feel that peace which they shall afterwards fully enjoy in heaven. To the saints death is not a punishment, but a reward. "When he shall give sleep to his beloved, behold the inheritance of the Lord." — Ps. cxxvi. 2. The death of the Christian that loves God is called, not death, but sleep: thus he shall be able to say, "In peace in the self-same I will sleep and I will rest." — Ps. iv. 9.

Father Suares died with so much peace, that in his last moments he exclaimed, "Non putabam tam dulce esse mori." I could never imagine that death would be so sweet. When Cardinal Baronius was advised by his physician not to fix his thoughts so much on death, he said, "Perhaps you think I am afraid of death. I fear it not; but, on the contrary, I love it." In going to death for the faith,

the cardinal of Rochester, as Saunders relates, put on his best clothes, saying that he was going to a nuptial feast. Hence, at the sight of the scaffold, he threw away his staff, and said, "Ite, pedes; parum a paradiso distamus." O my feet, walk fast; we are not far from paradise. Before death he entoned the *Te Deum*, to thank God for giving him the grace to die a martyr for the holy faith; and, full of joy, he laid his head on the block. St. Francis of Assisium began to sing at the hour of death, and invited the brethren to join him. Brother Elias said to him, "Father, at death we ought rather to weep than to sing." "But," replied the saint, "I cannot abstain from singing; for I see that I shall soon go to enjoy my God." A young nun of the order of St. Teresa, in her last illness, said to her sisters in religion who stood round her bed bathed in tears, "O God! why do you weep? I go to enjoy my Jesus. If you love me, rejoice with me." — Dising. parol. i. § 6.

Father Granada relates, that a certain sportsman found a solitary infected with leprosy, singing in his last agony. "How," said the sportsman, "can you sing in such a state?" "Brother," replied the hermit, "between me and God there is nothing but the wall of this body. I now see that my flesh is falling in pieces — that the prison shall soon be destroyed, and that I shall go to see my God. It is for this reason that I rejoice and sing." The desire of seeing God made St. Ignatius the martyr say, that if the wild beasts should not take away his life, he would provoke them to devour him. "Ego vim faciam ut devorer." St. Catharine of Genoa could not bear to hear death called a misfortune. Hence she would say, "O beloved death, in what a mistaken light are you viewed! Why do you not come

to me? I call on you night and day." — *Life of St. Catharine*, cap. vii. St. Teresa desired death so vehemently that she regarded the continuation of life as death: hence she composed the celebrated hymn, *I die because I do not die.* Such the light in which death appeared to the saints.

Affections and Prayers.

Ah! my supreme Good, my God, if for the past I have not loved thee, I now turn to thee with my whole soul. I take leave of all creatures, and choose thee, my most amiable Lord, for the sole object of my love. Tell me what thou wishest from me: I will do all that thou desirest. I have offended thee enough: I wish to spend all the remaining moments of life in pleasing thee. Give me grace to compensate by my love my past ingratitude, which has continued to this moment. I deserved to burn in the fire of hell for so many years; thou hast sought after me, and hast drawn me to thyself. Make me now burn with the fire of thy holy love. I love thee, O infinite Goodness! Thou justly claimest all the affections of my heart; for thou hast loved me more than all others have loved me. Thou alone deservest my love; thee only do I wish to love. I desire to do every thing in my power to please thee. Do with me whatsoever thou wishest. For me it is enough to love thee and to be loved by thee. Mary, my mother, assist me; pray to Jesus for me.

THIRD POINT.

And how can he fear death who hopes to receive a kingly crown in paradise? "Non vereamur occidi," says St. Cyprian, "quos constat quandc

occidimur, coronari?" How can he fear death who knows that by dying in the state of grace his body shall become immortal? "This mortal must put on immortality." — 1 Cor. xv. 53. He that loves God, and desires to see him, regards life as a punishment, and death as a source of joy. "Patienter vivit," says St. Augustine, "delectabiliter moritur." And St. Thomas of Villanova says, that death, if it find a man sleeping, comes like a thief, robs him, kills him, and casts him into the pit of hell. But if it find him watching, it comes as an ambassador from God, and salutes him, saying, The Lord expects you to the nuptial feast: come, I will conduct you to the happy kingdom for which you sigh. "Te Dominus ad nuptias vocat: veni, ducam te quo desideras."

O, with joy does he expect death who finds himself in the grace of God, and hopes soon to see Jesus Christ, and to hear from him these consoling words: "Well done, good and faithful servant; because thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will place thee over many." — Matt. xxv. 21. O, what consolation shall he then receive from his works of penance, his prayers, his detachment from earthly goods, and from all he has done for God! "Say to the just man, that it is well; for he shall eat the fruit of his doings." — Isa. iii. 10. Then he who has loved God shall taste the fruit of all his holy works. Hence, in hearing that a religious, his friend, died in sentiments of fervent piety, Father Hyppolitus Durazzo, of the Society of Jesus, wept not, but exulted with joy and gladness. "But," says St. John Chrysostom, "would it not be most unreasonable to believe that heaven is eternal, and to pity those who go to that kingdom of delights?" "Fateri cœlum, et eos, qui hinc eo com-

mearunt luctu prosequi?" — *Ad viduam.* What special consolation shall the just man receive at the hour of death from the devotions performed in honor of the mother of God, from the rosaries he had recited, from his visits to her image, from his fasts on Saturdays, from his frequent attendance at her congregation! Mary is called the faithful Virgin. O, how great is her fidelity in consoling her faithful servants at the hour of death! A certain votary of the most holy Virgin said, in his last moments, to Father Benetti, "Father, you cannot conceive the consolation which the thought of having served Mary infuses at the hour of death. O my father, if you knew the happiness I feel on account of having served this mother! I am not able to express it." How great shall be the joy of him who has loved Jesus Christ — who has often visited him in the most adorable sacrament, and has often received him in the holy communion, — when he shall see his Lord entering his room in the most holy viaticum, and coming to accompany him in his passage to eternity! Happy he who shall then be able, with St. Philip Neri, to say to his Savior, "Behold my love! Behold my love! Give me my love."

But you will, perhaps, say, "Who knows what shall be my lot? Who knows but I shall die an unhappy death?" Of you, who speak in this manner, I ask what it is that causes a bad death. Nothing but sin. We should then fear sin only, and not death. "Liquet," says St. Ambrose, "acerbitatem non mortis esse, sed culpæ: non ad mortem metus referendus, sed ad vitam." — De Bona Mort. c. viii. If, then, you desire not to fear death, lead a holy life. "With him that feareth the Lord, it shall go well in the latter end." — Eccl. i. 13.

Father Colombiere held it to be morally impossible that the man who has been faithful to God during life should die a bad death. And before him St. Augustine said, "He who has lived well cannot die badly. He who is prepared to die fears no death, however sudden." "The just man, if he be prevented with death, shall be in rest." — Wis. iv. 7. Since we cannot go to enjoy God without passing through death, St. John Chrysostom exhorts us to offer to God what we are obliged to give him. "Offeramus Deo quod tenemur reddere." And let us be persuaded that they who offer their death to God, make the most perfect act of divine love which it is in their power to perform; because, by cheerfully embracing that species of death which God is pleased to send, and at the time, and in the manner in which God sends it, they render themselves like the holy martyrs. He who loves God should desire and sigh after death; because it unites him forever with God, and delivers him from the danger of losing God. He who does not desire to see God speedily, and to be secured against the possibility of ever losing God, shows that he has but little love for God. Let us, during life, love him to the utmost of our power. We should make use of life only to advance in divine love; the measure of our love of God at death shall be the measure of our love for him in a happy eternity.

Affections and Prayers.

My Jesus, bind me to thyself, so that I may never more be separated from thee. Make me entirely thine before I die, that I may see thee appeased, O my Redeemer, the first time I shall behold thee. Thou soughtest after me when I fled away from thee; ah! do not cast me off, now that I seek after thee.

Pardon me all the offences I have given thee. From this day I will think only of serving and loving thee. Thou hast laid me under too many obligations; thou hast not refused to give thy blood and thy life for the love of me. I would wish to be entirely consumed for the love of thee. O God of my soul, I wish to love thee ardently in this life, that I may love thee ardently in the next. Eternal Father, draw my whole heart to thee; detach it from earthly affections; wound and inflame my whole soul with thy holy love. Through the merits of Jesus Christ, hear my prayers. Give me holy perseverance, and grant me the grace always to ask it of thee. Mary, my mother, assist me, and obtain for me the grace to ask unceasingly of thy Son the gift of holy perseverance.

TENTH CONSIDERATION.

MEANS OF PREPARING FOR DEATH.

"Remember thy last end, and thou shalt never sin."—Eccl. vii. 40.

FIRST POINT.

All confess that they shall die, and die only once, and that nothing is of greater importance than to die well; because on death depends whether we shall be forever in bliss or forever in despair. All know that their dying well or ill depends on their leading a good or a bad life. How, then, does it happen that the greater part of Christians live as if they were never to die, or as if to die well or ill was of little moment? They live in sin because they do

not think of death. "Remember thy last end, and thou shalt never sin." — Eccl. vii. 40. We must be persuaded that the hour of death is not fit for settling the accounts of the soul, and securing the great affair of eternal salvation. In worldly matters, prudent men take measures in due time to secure temporal gain — to obtain a situation of emolument. To preserve or restore bodily health, the necessary remedies are not deferred a single moment. What would you say of the man who should put off his preparation for a trial on which his life depended, till the day of trial arrived? Would you not stigmatize as a fool the general who should not begin to lay in a supply of provisions and arms, till the city is besieged? Would it not be folly in a pilot to neglect till the time of the tempest to provide the vessel with an anchor and a helm? Such precisely is the folly of the Christian who neglects to tranquillize his conscience till death arrives. "When sudden calamity shall fall on you, and destruction, as a tempest, then shall they call upon me, and I will not hear. .... Therefore they shall eat the fruit of their own way." — Prov. i. 27, &c. The time of death is a time of storm and confusion. At that awful hour, sinners call on God for assistance; but they invoke his aid through the fear of hell, which they see at hand, and not with true contrition of heart. It is for this reason that God is deaf to their cry; it is for this reason also that they shall then taste the fruit of their wicked life. What they have sown they shall reap. "For what things a man shall sow, those also shall he reap." — Gal. vi. 8. Ah! it will not then be enough to receive the sacraments; it is necessary at death to hate sin, and to love God above all things. But how can he, then, hate forbidden pleasures, who has loved them

till that moment? How can he love God above all things, who has till then loved creatures more than he loved God?

The Lord called the virgins foolish, who wished to prepare their lamps when the spouse came. All have a horror of a sudden death, because there is no time to settle the accounts of conscience. All confess that the saints have been truly wise, because they prepared for death during life. And what are we doing? Will we expose ourselves to the danger of preparing for death when it shall have arrived? We ought to do at present what we shall then wish to have done. O, what pain shall then arise from the remembrance of time lost, and still more from the remembrance of time spent in sin! — time given by God, to merit eternal life; but now past, and never to return! What anguish shall the sinner feel when he shall be told, "You can be steward no longer! There is no more time for doing penance, for frequenting the sacraments, for hearing sermons, for visiting Jesus Christ in the holy sacrament, or for prayer. What is done is done. To make a good confession, to remove several grievous scruples, and thus tranquillize the conscience, would require a better state of mind, and time more free from confusion and agitation. 'But time shall be no longer.'" — Apoc. x. 6.

Affections and Prayers.

Ah, my God, had I died on the nights known to thee, where should I be at present? I thank thee for having waited for me; I thank thee for all those moments which I should have spent in hell from the first moment that I offended thee. Ah! give me light, and make me sensible of the great evil I have done thee in voluntarily losing thy grace, which

thou didst merit for me by the sacrifice of thy life on the cross. Ah! my Jesus, pardon me; I am sorry from the bottom of my heart, and above all things, for having despised thee, who art infinite goodness. Ah! assist me, O my Savior, that I may never lose thee again. Alas! my Lord, if I return again to sin, after so many lights and graces which thou hast bestowed upon me, I should deserve a hell to be made on purpose for myself. Through the merits of that blood which thou hast shed for my sake, do not permit me ever more to offend thee. Give me holy perseverance, give me thy love. I love thee, and I will never cease to love thee till death. My God, have mercy on me for the love of Jesus Christ. O Mary, my hope, do thou have pity on me; recommend me to God; thy recommendations are never rejected by that God who loves thee so tenderly.

SECOND POINT.

Brother, since it is certain that you shall die, go as soon as possible to the foot of the crucifix; thank your crucified Redeemer for the time which in his mercy he gives you to tranquillize your conscience; and then take a review of all the irregularities of your past life, particularly of your youth. Give a glance at the commandments of God; examine yourself on the duties of the state of life in which you have lived, and on the society you have frequented; mark down in writing the sins you have committed; make a general confession of your whole life, if you have not as yet made one. O, how much does a general confession contribute to regularity of life in a Christian! Consider that you have to settle accounts for eternity; and take care to adjust them as if you were on the point of ren-

dering these accounts to Jesus Christ at judgment Banish from your heart every sinful affection, and every sentiment of rancor; remove every ground of scruple on account of the injury done to the property or character of others, or of scandal to your neighbor; and resolve to fly from all those occasions in which you should be in danger of losing God. Remember that what now seems difficult, shall appear impossible at the hour of death.

It is still more important for you to resolve to practise the means of preserving your soul in the grace of God. These means are, — hearing mass every day, the meditation of the eternal truths, the frequentation of the sacraments of penance and eucharist at least every eight days, the visit every day to the most holy sacrament, and to an image of the divine mother, attendance at her congregation, spiritual reading, examen of conscience every evening, some special devotion to most holy Mary, along with fasting every Saturday in her honor. Above all, resolve to recommend yourself frequently to God and to the Blessed Virgin, and frequently to invoke, in the time of temptations, the sacred names of Jesus and Mary. These are the names by which you shall be able to secure a happy death, and to obtain eternal life.

The practice of these means shall be for you a great sign of your predestination. And as to the past, trust in the blood of Jesus Christ, who now gives you these lights, because he desires your salvation; and trust in the intercession of Mary, who obtains these lights for you. O, if you adopt this mode of life, and place great confidence in Jesus and Mary, what aid shall you receive from God, and what strength shall your soul acquire! Dearly beloved reader, give yourself then instantly to God,

who invites you, and begin to enjoy that peace of which you have been hitherto deprived through your own fault. And what greater peace can a soul enjoy, than to be able to say, in going to rest at night, "Should death come this night, I hope to die in the grace of God"! How happy the man who, amid the terrors of thunder or of earthquakes, is prepared to accept death with resignation, should God be pleased to send it!

Affections and Prayers.

Ah, my Lord! with what fervor do I thank thee for the light which thou givest me! I have so often abandoned thee and turned my back upon thee; but thou hast not abandoned me. Hadst thou abandoned me, I should now be blind, as I have hitherto wished to be; I should be obstinate in my sins, and should not have the desire either to renounce sin or to love thee. I now feel a great sorrow for having offended thee, a great desire to be in the state of grace. I feel a hatred of these accursed delights which have made me lose thy friendship. These sentiments are all graces which come from thee, and make me hope that thou wilt pardon and save me. Since, then, after all my sins, thou hast not abandoned me — since thou now wishest to save me — behold, O Lord, I give myself entirely to thee. I am sorry, above all things, for having offended thee; and I purpose to lose life a thousand times, rather than forfeit thy grace. I love thee, O my Sovereign Good; I love thee, O my Jesus, who hast died for me; and I hope in thy blood, that thou wilt not permit me to be ever again separated from thee. O my Jesus, I will never more lose thee. I wish to love thee always during life. I wish to love thee at death. I wish to love thee for all eternity. Pre-

serve me, then, O Lord, at all times, and increase my love for thee. This favor I ask through thy merits. Mary, my hope, pray to Jesus for me.

THIRD POINT.

It is also necessary to endeavor to be at all times in the state in which we desire to be at death. "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord." — Apoc. xiv. 13. St. Ambrose says, that they die well who, at the hour of death, are found dead to the world; that is, detached from the goods from which death shall separate us by force. We ought, then, from this moment, to accept the spoliation of our goods, and the separation from relatives and from every thing in this world. Unless we do it voluntarily during life, we shall have to do it through necessity at death, but with extreme pain and great danger of eternal perdition. Hence St. Augustine says, that to settle during life all temporal matters, and to dispose, by will, of all the goods we shall have to bequeath, contribute greatly to a tranquil death; because, when all worldly affairs are already adjusted, the soul may be entirely occupied in uniting herself with God. At that hour, we should think and speak only of God and of paradise. These last moments are too precious to be squandered in earthly thoughts. At death is completed the crown of the elect; for it is then, perhaps, that they reap the greatest harvest of merits, by embracing, with resignation and love, death and all its pains.

But the Christian who has not been in the habit of exciting these sentiments during life, shall not have them at the hour of death. Hence, some devout souls, with great spiritual profit to themselves, are accustomed to renew, every month, after being

at confession and communion, the protestation of death along with the Christian acts, imagining themselves at the point of death, and to be near their departure from this world.* Unless thou dost this during life, thou shalt find it very difficult to do it at death. In her last illness, that great servant of God, Sister Catharine of St. Albertus, of the order of St. Teresa, sent forth a sigh, and said, "Sisters, I do not sigh for fear of death, for I have lived for twenty-five years in expectation of it; but I sigh at the sight of so many deluded Christians, who spend their life in sin, and reduce themselves to the necessity of making peace with God at death, when I can scarcely pronounce the name of Jesus."

Examine, then, O my brother, if you are now attached to any thing on this earth, to any person, to any honor, to your house, your money, to conversations or amusements; and reflect that you are not immortal. You must one day, and perhaps very soon, take leave of them all. Why, then, do you cherish any attachment to them, and thus expose yourself to the risk of an unhappy death? Offer, from this moment, all to God; tell him you are ready to give up all things whenever he pleases to deprive you of them. If you wish to die with resignation, you must from this moment resign yourself to all the contradictions and adversities which may happen to you, and must divest yourself of all affections to earthly things. Imagine yourself on the bed of death, and you shall despise all things in this world. "He," says Jerome, "who always thinks that he is to die, easily despises all things."

* In a little book, entitled "Visits to the Most Holy Sacrament," is found this protestation, containing the Christian acts preparatory to death. It is short, and may be read in a few minutes. This protestation is inserted at the end of this volume.

If you have not as yet chosen a state of life, make choice of that state of life which you shall at death wish to have selected, and which shall make you die with greater peace. If you have already made choice of a state of life, do now what you shall at death wish to have done in that state. Spend every day as if it were the last of your life; and perform every action, every exercise of prayer, make every confession and communion, as if they were the last of your life. Imagine yourself every hour at the point of death, stretched on a bed, and that you hear that "*Proficiscere de hoc mundo*," which announces your departure from this world. O, how powerfully shall this thought assist you to walk in the way of God, and to detach your heart from this earth! "Blessed is that servant whom, when his Lord shall come, he shall find him so doing." — Matt. xxiv. 46. He who expects death every hour, shall die well, though death should come suddenly upon him.

Affections and Prayers.

Every Christian ought to be prepared to say at the moment the news of death shall be announced to him, "Then, my God, only a few hours remain during the short remainder of the present life, I wish to love thee to the utmost of my power, that I may love thee more perfectly in heaven. But little remains for me to offer to thee. I offer thee these pains, and the sacrifice of my life in union with the sacrifice which Jesus Christ offered for me on the cross. Lord, the pains which I suffer are few and light, compared with what I have deserved: such as they are, I embrace them as a mark of the love which I bear thee. Provided I am to love thee for eternity, I resign myself to all the punishments which thou

wishest to send me in this or the next life. Chastise me as much as thou pleasest, but do not deprive me of thy love. I know that, on account of having so often despised thy love, I deserved never more to love thee; but thou canst not reject a penitent soul. I am sorry, O Sovereign Good, for having offended thee. I love thee with my whole heart, and place all my trust in thee. Thy death, O my Redeemer, is my hope. To thy wounded hands I recommend my soul. "Into thy hands I commend my spirit: thou hast redeemed me, O Lord, the God of truth."—Ps. xxx. 6. O my Jesus, thou hast given thy blood for my salvation: do not suffer me to be separated from thee. I love thee, O eternal God, and hope to love thee for eternity. Mary, my mother, assist me at the awful moment of death. To thee I now consign my spirit; to thee I recommend myself. Deliver me from hell.

ELEVENTH CONSIDERATION.

VALUE OF TIME.

"Son, observe the time."—Eccl. iv. 23.

FIRST POINT.

"Son," says the Holy Ghost, "be careful to preserve time, which is the greatest and the most precious gift which God can bestow upon you in this life." The very pagans knew the value of time. Seneca said that no price is an equivalent for it. "Nullum temporis pretium." But the saints have understood its value still better. According to St.

Bernardine of Sienna, a moment of time is of as much value as God; because in each moment a man can by acts of contrition or of love, acquire the grace of God and eternal glory. "Modico tempore potest homo lucrari gratiam et gloriam. Tempus tantum valet, quantum Deus: quippe in tempore bene consumpto comparatur Deus."—Fer. quarta post Dom. I. quad., cap. iv.

Time is a treasure which is found only in this life; it is not found in the next, either in hell or in heaven. In hell the damned exclaim with tears, "O that an hour was given to us!" They would pay any price for an hour of time, in which they might repair their ruin; but this hour they shall never have. In heaven there is no wailing; but, were the saints capable of weeping, all their tears should arise from the thought of having lost the time in which they could have acquired greater glory, and from the conviction that this time shall never again be given to them. A deceased Benedictine nun appeared in glory to a certain person, and said that she was perfectly happy; but that, if she could desire any thing, it would be to return to life, and to suffer pains and privations in order to merit an increase of glory. She added that, for the glory which corresponds to a single Ave Maria, she would be content to endure till the day of judgment the painful illness which caused her death.

My brother, how do you spend your time? Why do you always defer till to-morrow what you can do to-day? Remember that the time which is past is no longer yours; the future is not under your control; you have only the present for the performance of good works. "Why, O miserable man," says St. Bernard, "do you presume on the future, as if the Father had placed time in your power?"—

Serm. xxxviii. de Part., &c. St. Augustine asks, "Diem tenes qui horam non tenes?" How can you, who are not sure of an hour, promise yourself to-morrow? "If, then," says St. Teresa, "you are not prepared for death to-day, tremble lest you die an unhappy death."

Affections and Prayers.

O my God, I thank thee for the time which thou givest me to repair the disorders of my past life. Were I to die at this moment, the remembrance of the time I have lost should be one of my greatest torments. Ah, my Lord, thou hast given me time to love thee, and I have spent it in offending thee. I deserve to be sent to hell from the first moment in which I turned my back upon thee; but thou hast called me to repentance, and hast pardoned me. I promised to offend thee no more; but how often have I returned to sin! How often hast thou pardoned my ungrateful relapses! Blessed forever be thy mercy. If it were not infinite, how couldst thou have had so much patience with me? Who could have borne with me so long? O, how sorry do I feel for having offended so good a God! My Savior, the patience alone with which thou waitest for me ought to enamor me of thee. Ah! do not suffer me to live any longer ungrateful to the love thou hast had for me. Detach me from every creature, and draw me entirely to thyself. O my God, I will no longer dissipate the time thou givest me to repair the evil that I have done; I will spend it all in serving and loving thee. Give me holy perseverance. I love thee, O Infinite Goodness, and hope to love thee for eternity. I thank thee, O Mary; by thy advocacy thou hast obtained for me this time which is given to me. Assist me now, and

obtain for me the grace to spend it all in loving thy Son, my Redeemer, and in loving thee, my queen and my mother.

SECOND POINT.

There is nothing more precious than time; but there is nothing less esteemed and more despised by men of the world. St. Bernardine weeps over their blindness. "Nihil," he says, "pretiosius tempore, sed nihil vilius æstimatur. . . . . Transeunt dies salutis, et nemo recogitat sibi perire diem, et numquam rediturum." — Serm. ad Schol. You will see a gamester spend nights and days in play. If you ask him what he is doing, his answer is, "I am passing the time." You shall see others standing several hours in the street, looking at those who pass by, and speaking on obscene or on useless subjects. If you ask them what they are doing, they will say, "We are passing the time." Poor, blind sinners! who lose so many days; but days which never return.

O time despised during life! you shall be ardently desired by worldlings at the hour of death. They shall then wish for another year, another month, another day; but they shall not obtain it: they shall then be told "that time shall be no longer." — Apoc. x. 6. How much would they then pay for another week, or another day, to settle the accounts of conscience! To obtain a single hour, they would, says St. Lawrence Justinian, give all their wealth and worldly possessions.

Erogaret opes, honores, delicias pro una horula." — De Vita Sol., cap. x. But this hour shall not be given. The assisting priest shall say to the dying sinner, Hasten, hasten your departure from this

world; for your time is no more. "*Proficiscere, anima Christiana, de hoc mundo.*"

The prophet exhorts us to remember God, and to procure his friendship, before the light fails. "Remember thy Creator . . . . before the sun and the light be darkened." — Eccl. xii. 1. How great the distress and misery of a traveller who, when the night has come, perceives that he has missed the way, and that there is no time to correct the mistake! Such at death shall be the anguish of the Christian who has lived many years in the world, and has not spent them for God. "The night cometh, when no man can work." — John ix. 4. For him, death shall be the night in which he shall be able to do nothing. "He hath called against me the time." — Lamen. i. 15. Conscience shall then remind the worldling of all the time which God gave him, and which he has spent in the destruction of his soul; of all the calls and graces which he has received from God for his sanctification, and which he has voluntarily abused. The sinner shall then see that the way of salvation is closed forever. Hence he shall weep, and say, "O fool that I have been! O time lost! O life misspent! O lost years, in which I could have, but have not, become a saint! And now the time of salvation is gone forever." But of what use are these sighs and lamentations, when the scene is about to close, the lamp on the point of being extinguished, and when the dying sinner has reached that awful moment on which eternity depends?

Affections and Prayers.

Ah, my Jesus, thou hast spent thy whole life for the salvation of my soul. There has not been a single moment of thy life, in which thou hast not

offered thyself to the eternal Father to obtain for me pardon and eternal glory. I have been so many years in the world, and how many of them have I hitherto spent for thee? Ah! all that I remember to have done produces remorse of conscience. The evil has been great — the good very little; and all full of imperfections and tepidity, of self-love and distractions. Ah! my Redeemer, all this has arisen from my forgetfulness of what thou hast done for me. I have forgotten thee, but thou hast not forgotten me; when I fled from thee, thou hast followed me, and called me so often to thy love. Behold me, O Jesus; I will resist no longer. Will I wait till thou dost abandon me? I am sorry, O Sovereign Good, for having separated myself from thee by sin. I love thee, O Infinite Goodness, worthy of infinite love. Ah! do not permit me ever again to lose this time, which thou in thy mercy givest me. Ah! remind me always, O my beloved Savior, of the love thou hast borne me, and of the pains thou hast endured for me. Make me forget all things, that, during the remainder of my life, I may think only of loving and pleasing thee. I love thee, my Jesus, my love, my all. I promise, whenever thou dost remind me, to make acts of love. Give me holy perseverance. I place all my confidence in the merits of thy blood. I also trust in thy intercession, O my dear mother, Mary.

THIRD POINT.

"*Walk whilst you have light.*" — John xii. 35. We must walk in the way of the Lord during life, now that we have light; for at the hour of death this light is taken away. Death is not the time for preparing, but for finding ourselves prepared. *Be*

ye ready. At the hour of death, we can do nothing; what is then done, is done. O God! were a person told that in a short time a trial should take place, on which would depend his life and his entire property, with what haste would he seek an able advocate! How little time would he lose in adopting every means of securing a favorable result! And what are we doing? We know for certain that the most important of all causes — the affair of eternal salvation — shall be soon decided; the decision may take place every hour, and still we lose time.

Some may say, "I am young; I will hereafter give myself to God." But remember that, as the gospel remarks, the Lord cursed the fig-tree the first time he found it without fruit, although the season for figs had not arrived. "For it was not the time for figs." — Mark xi. 13. By this Jesus Christ wished to signify that men should at all times, even in youth, bring forth fruits of good works; otherwise, they shall be accursed, and shall never more bring forth fruit. "May no man hereafter eat fruit of thee any more forever." — ver. 14. Such the malediction of the Redeemer on the fruitless fig-tree; such his malediction against all who resist his calls. Satan regards the whole time of our life as short, and, therefore, in tempting us, he loses not a moment. "The devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, knowing that he hath but a short time." — Apoc. xii. 12.

Then, the devil loses no time in seeking our perdition; and shall we lose the time given to us to secure our salvation?

Some will say, "What evil am I doing?" O God, is it not an evil to lose time in gaming, in useless conversations, which are unprofitable to the soul

Does God give you time that you may squander it away? No; the Holy Ghost says, "Defraud not thyself of the good day, and let not the part of a good gift overpass thee."—Eccl. xiv. 14. The workmen mentioned by St. Matthew, though they did no evil, but only lost time, were rebuked by the master of the vineyard. "Why stand you here all the day idle?"—Matt. xx. 6. On the day of judgment, Jesus Christ will demand an account of every idle word. All time which is not spent for God is lost time. Believe, says St. Bernard, that you have lost all the time in which you have not thought of God. "Omne tempus quo de Deo non cogitasti, cogita te perdidisse."—Coll. 1, cap. viii. Hence the Holy Ghost says, "Whatsoever thy hand is able to do, do it earnestly; for neither work nor reason shall be in hell, whither thou art hastening."—Eccl. ix. 10. The Venerable Sister Jane, of the most holy Trinity, of the order of St. Teresa, used to say that in the lives of the saints there is no to-morrow. To-morrow is found in the life of sinners, who always say, "Hereafter, hereafter;" and in this state they continue till death. "Behold, now is the acceptable time."—2 Cor. vi. 2. "To-day, if you shall hear his voice, harden not your hearts."—Ps. xciv. 8. If God call you to-day to do good, do it; for to-morrow it may happen that for you time shall be no more, or that God shall call you no more.

If you have hitherto spent the time in offending God, endeavor, like King Ezechias, to weep, during the remainder of your life, over your misspent years. "I will recount to thee all my years in the bitterness of my soul."—Isa. xxxviii. 15. God spares your life that you may repair the time you have lost. "Redeeming the time, for the days are

evil." — Eph. v. 16. In explaining this passage, St. Anselm says, "You shall redeem the time, if you do what you have neglected to do." Of St. Paul, St. Jerome says that, though the last of the apostles, he was, on account of his great labors after his vocation, the first in merits. "Paulus novissimus in ordine, primus in meritis, quia plus omnibus laboravit." Let us reflect that in each moment of time we may acquire new treasures of eternal riches. Were all the land round which you could walk, or all the money which you could count in a day, promised to you, would you not hasten to walk over the ground, or to reckon the money? In each moment you can acquire eternal treasures: will you, notwithstanding, squander away your time? Say not that what you can do to-day, you shall be able to do to-morrow; for this day shall then be lost, and shall never return. When his companions spoke of the world, St. Francis Borgia conversed with God by holy affections; and so recollected was he, that, when asked his opinion on the subject of conversation, he knew not what to answer. Being corrected for this, he said, "Malo rudis vocari, quam temporis jacturam pati." I would rather be considered stupid and unlearned, than lose time.

Affections and Prayers.

No, my God, I will no longer lose the time which thou in thy mercy givest me. I should at this hour be in hell weeping without fruit. I thank thee for having preserved my life; I wish, during the remainder of my days, to live only for thee. Were I now in hell, I should weep in despair and without profit; I will now bewail the offences I have offered to thee; and if I weep over them, I know for certain

that thou wilt pardon me. Of this the prophet assures me: "Weeping, thou shalt not weep; he will surely have pity on thee." — Is. xxx. 19. Were I in hell, I could never more love thee; and now I love thee, and hope always to love thee. Were I in hell, I could ask no more graces; but now I hear thee say, "*Ask and you shall receive.*" Since, then, I still have time to ask thy graces, O God of my soul, I ask two graces: — give me perseverance in thy grace; give me thy love; and then do with me what thou pleasest. Grant that in all the remaining moments of my life I may always recommend myself to thee, saying, "Lord, assist me; have mercy on me; grant that I may never more offend thee; make me love thee." Most holy Mary, my mother, obtain for me the grace always to recommend myself to God, and to ask him for perseverance and for his holy love.

TWELFTH CONSIDERATION.

ON THE IMPORTANCE OF SALVATION.

"But we entreat you, brethren, ... that you do your own business." — 1 Thess. iv. 10, 11.

FIRST POINT.

The business of eternal salvation is to us the most important of all business; but it is also the most neglected by Christians. They are diligent, and lose no time in seeking to gain a lawsuit or a situation of emolument. How many measures taken to attain these objects! How many means adopted! They neither eat nor sleep. And what

efforts do they make to secure their eternal salvation? How do they live? To save their souls, the greater number of Christians do nothing; on the contrary, they do every thing to bring their souls to perdition; they live as if death, judgment, hell, heaven, and eternity, were not truths of faith, but fables invented by the poets. If a person lose a lawsuit, or a harvest crop, how great is his pain and distress of mind! With what zeal does he labor to repair the loss! If worldlings lose a horse, or a dog, with what diligence do they seek after it! But if they lose the grace of God, they sleep, and jest, and laugh. All blush at being told that they neglect their worldly affairs; but how few are ashamed to neglect the business of eternity, which is the most important of all business. The worldling says that the saints were truly wise, because they sought only the salvation of their souls; and still he attends to all worldly business, but utterly neglects the concerns of the soul. Brethren, says St. Paul, let the great business of your eternal salvation be the sole object of all your care. This is to you the most important of all affairs. "Rogamus vos, ut vestrum negotium agatis." Let us then be persuaded that eternal salvation is for us the most important business — the only business — and that, if once neglected, it is an irreparable business.

It is the most important business; because, if the soul be lost, all is lost. We ought to set a higher value on the soul than all the goods of the earth. "The soul," says St. Chrysostom, "is more precious than the whole world!" To be convinced of this truth, it is enough to know that God himself has condemned his Son to death in order to save our souls. "For God so loved

the world, as to give his only-begotten Son." — Joan. iii 16. The Eternal Word has not refused to purchase them with his own blood. "You are bought with a great price." — 1 Cor. vi. 20. Hence a holy father says, that man appears to be of as much value as God. "Tam pretioso munere humana redemptio agitur, ut homo Deum valere videatur." Hence Jesus Christ has asked, "What exchange shall a man give for his soul?" — Matt. xvi. 26. If, then, such is the value of the soul, for what earthly good shall a man exchange and lose it?

St. Philip Neri had just reason to say that he who does not attend to the salvation of his soul, is a fool. Were there on this earth two classes of men, one mortal and the other immortal, and were the former to see the latter seeking after the things of this world, its honors, goods, and amusements, they should certainly exclaim, "O fools that you are! you have it in your power to acquire eternal riches; and do you fix your thoughts on those miserable and transitory things? Will you, for these, condemn yourselves to an eternity of torments in the next life? Leave us, for whom all shall end at death, to seek after these earthly goods." But no; we are all immortal. How, then, does it happen that so many lose their souls for the miserable pleasures of this life? How does it come to pass, says Salvian, that Christians believe in judgment, hell, and eternity, and still live as if they feared them not? "Quid causæ est quod Christianus, si futura credit, futura non timeat?"

Affections and Prayers.

Ah, my God! how have I spent so many years, which thou hast given me in order to secure my eternal salvation? Thou, my Redeemer, hast

purchased my soul with thy blood, and hast consigned it to me that I might attend to its salvation; and I have labored only for its perdition by offending thee, who hast loved me so tenderly. I thank thee for giving me time to be able to repair the great loss which I have suffered. I have lost my soul and thy grace. Lord, I am sorry with my whole heart for my past offences, and I resolve, henceforth, to lose every thing, even my life, rather than forfeit thy friendship. I love thee above all things, and I resolve always to love thee, my Sovereign Good, who art worthy of infinite love. Assist me, my Jesus, that this purpose may not be like my past resolutions, to which I have been always unfaithful. Take me out of life rather than suffer me ever again to offend thee, or ever to cease to love thee. O Mary, my hope after Jesus, save me by obtaining for me holy perseverance.

SECOND POINT.

The business of eternal salvation is not only the most important, but it is the only business to which we have to attend in this life. "Porro unum est necessarium." One thing is necessary. St. Bernard weeps over the blindness of Christians, who call the occupations of children trifles, and their own employments business. "Nugæ puerorum, nugæ vocantur: nugæ majorum, negotia vocantur." If the amusements of children be trifles, the avocations of men are still greater follies. What, says the Redeemer, will it profit us to gain the whole world if we lose our souls? "What doth it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul!" — Matt. xvi. 26. My brother, if you save your soul, it will do you no harm to have lived

here in poverty, afflictions, and contempt; for then you shall have no more sorrows, and you shall be happy for all eternity. But if you lose your soul, what will it profit you, in hell, to have indulged in all the amusements of the world, and to have enjoyed its riches and honors? If the soul be lost, amusements, riches, and honors, are lost — all is lost.

What answer shall you give on the day of accounts? Were a king to send an ambassador to a city to transact some important business, and were the legate, instead of attending to the charge intrusted to him, to spend all his time in banquets, comedies, and festivities, and thus injure the rights of his master, what account would the sovereign demand of him at his return? But, O God! how strict must be the account which the Lord shall exact of him who, after being placed in this world, not to indulge in amusements, nor to acquire wealth and dignity, but to save his soul, shall have attended to every thing except his own salvation? Worldlings think of the present, but not of the future. St. Philip Neri, conversing one day in Rome with Francis Zazzera, a young man of talent, who was attached to the world, said to him, "You shall realize a great fortune; you shall be a prelate, afterwards, perhaps, a cardinal, and, perhaps, even pope. But what must follow? what must follow? Go," said the saint, "and meditate on these last words." Francis went home, and, after reflecting on the words, What must follow? what must follow? he abandoned his secular pursuits, left the world, entered into the congregation of St. Philip, and began to attend only to God.

It is our only business, because we have but one soul. A prince asked, through his ambassador, a

favor of Benedict the Twelfth, which could not be granted without sin. In answer, the pope said, "Tell the prince that if I had two souls, I might, perhaps, lose one of them for him, and reserve the other to myself; but, since I have but one, I cannot and will not lose it." St. Francis Xavier used to say that there is but one good and one evil in the world; the former consists in the salvation of the soul; the latter in her damnation. St. Teresa used frequently to say to her nuns, "One soul, one eternity." As if she said, "One soul; if this be lost, all is lost: one eternity; the soul, if lost once, is lost forever." Hence David said, "One thing have I asked of the Lord; this I will seek after, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord." — Ps. xxvi. 4. Lord, I ask but one favor — save my soul, and I ask nothing else.

"With fear and trembling work out your salvation." — Phil. ii. 12. He that does not fear and tremble for his salvation shall not be saved. To save the soul, it is necessary to labor, and to do violence to nature. "The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent bear it away." — Matt. xi. 12. To obtain eternal glory, our life must be found at death conformable to the life of Jesus Christ. "Prædestinavit conformes fieri imaginis Filii sui." — Rom. viii. 29. Hence we must be careful, on the one hand, to avoid the occasions of sin; and, on the other, to adopt the means necessary for the attainment of eternal life. "Regnum non dabitur vagantibus," says St. Bernard, "sed pro servitio digne laborantibus." All would wish to be saved without trouble. The devil, says St. Augustine, sleeps not, but labors strenuously for your perdition; and will you slumber when your eternal happiness is at stake? "Vigilat hostis, dormis tu?"

Affections and Prayers.

Ah, my God, I thank thee for making me now remain at thy feet, and not in hell, which I have so often deserved. But of what use would the life which thou hast preserved, be to me, should I continue to live without thy grace? Ah, may this never be. I have turned my back upon thee; I have lost thee, O my Sovereign Good; I am sorry for it with my whole heart. O that I had died a thousand times, rather than have offended thee! I have lost thee; but the prophet tells me that thou art all goodness, and that thou art easily found by the soul that seeks thee. "Bonus est Dominus animæ quærenti illum." — Thren. iii. 25. If I have hitherto fled away from thee, I now seek thee, and seek nothing but thee. I love thee with all the affections of my heart. Accept me. Do not disdain to give thy love to a soul that hath at one time despised thee. "Doce me facere voluntatem tuam." Teach me what I must do in order to please thee; I am ready and willing to do it. Ah, my Jesus, save this soul, for which thou hast given thy blood and thy life; and in order to save me, give me the grace always to love thee in this and in the next life. This grace I hope for through thy merits. For this I also hope, O Mary, through thy intercession.

THIRD POINT.

Important business! only business! irreparable business! "Sane supra omnem errorem est," says St. Eucherius, "dissimulare negotium æternæ salutis." No error can be compared to the error of neglecting eternal salvation. For all other errors

there is a remedy; if you lose property in one way, you may recover it in another; if you lose a situation, there may be some means of afterwards regaining it; if you soon lose your life, provided your soul be saved, all is safe. But if you lose your soul, the loss is irreparable. Death happens but once; the soul, if once lost, is lost forever. "Perisse semel æternum est." Nothing remains but to weep for eternity with the other miserable fools in hell, where their greatest torment consists in the conviction, that the time of repairing their ruin is gone forever. "The summer is over, and we are not saved." — Jer. viii. 20. Ask the worldly wise, who are now in the pit of fire, what are their present sentiments; ask them if, now that they are condemned to that eternal prison, they feel happy at having made a fortune in this life. Listen to their wailing and lamentation — "Therefore we have erred." But of what use is it to know their error, now that there is no remedy for their eternal damnation? Should a man who could have preserved his palace at a small expense, find it in ruins, how great should be his pain in reflecting on his own negligence, and on the impossibility of repairing the evil!

The greatest torment of the damned consists in the thought of having lost their soul, and of being damned, through their own fault. "Destruction is thy own, O Israel; thy help is only in me." — Osee xiii. 9. St. Teresa says, that if a person lose, through his own fault, a ring, or even a trifle, his peace is disturbed, he neither eats nor sleeps. O God! how great shall be the torture of the damned Christian, when, on entering hell and finding himself shut up in that dungeon of torments, he shall reflect on his misfortune, and shall see that for all eternity there

shall be no relief, no mitigation of pain! He shall say, "I have lost my soul, paradise, and God; I have lost all forever! And why? Through my own fault."

But you will say, "If I commit this sin, why should I not expect to escape damnation? I may still be saved." Yes, but you may also be damned; and it is more likely that you shall be lost, for the Scriptures menace eternal woes to all obstinate traitors, such as you are in your present dispositions. "Woe to you, apostate children, saith the Lord." — Isa. xxx. 1. "Woe to them, for they have departed from me." — Osee vii. 13. By committing this sin, you at least expose your eternal salvation to great danger. And is this an affair to be exposed to risk? There is not a question of a house, of a villa, or of a situation; there is a question, says St. John Chrysostom, of being sent into an eternity of torments, and of losing an eternity of glory. "De immortalibus suppliciis, de cœlestis regni amissione agitur." And will you risk on a *perhaps*, this business of sovereign importance?

You say, "Perhaps I shall not be lost; I hope that God will hereafter pardon me." But what happens in the mean time? You condemn yourself to hell. Tell me, would you cast yourself into a deep pool of water, saying, "Perhaps I shall not be drowned?" Surely you would not; why, then, should you trust your eternal salvation to such a groundless hope, to a *perhaps?* O, how many has this accursed hope sent to hell! Do you not know that the hope of those who are obstinately determined to commit sin, is not hope, but an illusion and presumption, which moves God not to mercy, but to greater wrath? If you say that you are now unable to resist the temptation and passion to whose

domination you submit, how will you resist them hereafter, when, by yielding to sin, your strength shall be not increased, but greatly diminished? For, on the one hand, your own malice shall render you more blind and obdurate; and, on the other, the divine helps shall be withheld. Do you expect that the more you will multiply sins and insults against God, the more abundantly he will pour upon you his lights and graces?

Affections and Prayers.

Ah, my Jesus, remind me always of the death thou hast suffered for me, and give me confidence. I tremble lest the devil should make me despair at death by bringing before my view the many acts of treason I have committed against thee. How many promises have I made never more to offend thee after the light thou hast given me! and, after all my promises, I have, with the hope of pardon, again turned my back upon thee. Then have I insulted thee because thou didst not chastise me? My Redeemer, give me a great sorrow for my sins before I leave this world. I am sorry, O Sovereign Good, for having offended thee. I promise to die a thousand times, rather than ever abandon thee. But make me in the mean time feel that thou hast said to me what thou saidst to Magdalene, — "*Thy sins are forgiven thee*," — by giving me, before death, a great sorrow for all my iniquities, otherwise I fear my death shall be troubled and unhappy. "Be not thou a terror to me; thou art my hope in the day of affliction." — Jer. xvii. 17. O my crucified Jesus, be not a terror to me in my last moments. If I die before I shall have wept over my sins, and shall have loved thee, thy wounds and thy blood shall inspire me with fear, rather than

with confidence. I do not ask of thee consolations and earthly goods during the remainder of my life; I ask of thee sorrow and love. O my dear Savior, hear my prayer for the sake of that love which made thee offer thy life in sacrifice for me on Calvary. Mary, my mother, obtain for me these graces, along with holy perseverance till death.

THIRTEENTH CONSIDERATION.

VANITY OF THE WORLD.

"What doth it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, and suffer the loss of his own soul?" — Matt. xvi. 26.

FIRST POINT.

An ancient philosopher, called Aristippus, was once shipwrecked, and lost all his goods. When he reached the shore, the people, through respect for his great learning, presented him with an equivalent of all he had lost. He wrote to his friends, exhorting them to imitate his example, and to seek only the goods which cannot be wrested from them by shipwreck. Now, our relatives and friends who are in eternity exhort us from the other world to attend only to the acquisition of goods which even death cannot take from us. Death is called "*the day of destruction.*" — Deut. xxxii. 35. It is the day of destruction, because on that day we shall lose all the goods of this earth — its honors, riches, and pleasures. Hence, according to St. Ambrose, we cannot call the things of this life our goods, because we cannot bring them with us to eternity. Our virtues alone accompany us to the next life.

"Non nostra sunt quæ non possumus auferre nobiscum: sola virtus nos comitatur."

What, then, says Jesus Christ, does it profit us to gain the whole world, if, at death, by losing the soul, we lose all? Ah! how many young men has this great maxim sent into the cloister! how many anchorets has it sent to the desert! and how many martyrs has it encouraged to give their life for Jesus Christ! By this maxim St. Ignatius of Loyola drew many souls to God, particularly the soul of St. Francis Xavier, who was then in Paris attached to the things of the world. "Francis," said the saint one day, "reflect that the world is a traitor, which promises but does not perform. And though it should fulfil all its promises, it can never content your heart. But let us grant that it did make you happy; how long shall this happiness last? Can it last longer than your life; and after death, what shall you take with you to eternity? Where is the rich man that has ever brought with him a piece of money, or a servant to attend him? What king has brought with him a shred of the purple as a badge of royalty?" At these words St. Francis abandoned the world, followed St. Ignatius, and became a saint. Solomon confessed that "whatsoever his eyes desired, he refused them not."—Eccl. ii. 10. But, after having indulged in all the pleasures of this earth, he called all the goods of the world *vanity of vanities*. Sister Margaret of St. Anne, a Discalced Carmelite, and daughter of the emperor Rodolph the Second, used to say, "Of what use are kingdoms at the hour of death?" The saints tremble at the thought of the uncertainty of their eternal salvation. Father Paul Segneri trembled, and, full of terror, said to his confessor, "Father, what do you think—shall I be saved?"

St. Andrew Avellino trembled, and, with a torrent of tears, said, "Who knows whether I shall be saved or lost?" St. Lewis Bertrand was so much terrified by this thought, that, during the night, in a fit of terror, he sprung out of his bed, saying, "Perhaps I shall be lost!" And sinners, while they live in a state of damnation, sleep, and jest, and laugh!

Affections and Prayers.

Ah, Jesus, my Redeemer, I thank thee for making me see my folly and the evil I have done in turning my back on thee, who hast given thy blood and thy life for me. Thou didst not deserve to be treated by me as I have treated thee. Behold! if death now came upon me, what should I find but sins and remorses of conscience, which would make me die with great disquietude? My Savior, I confess that I have done evil, and committed a great error in leaving thee, my Sovereign Good, for the miserable pleasures of this world. I am sorry from the bottom of my heart. Ah! through the sorrow which killed thee on the cross, give me a sorrow for my sins, which shall make me weep, during the remainder of my life, over the injuries I have done thee. My Jesus, pardon me; I promise to displease thee no more, and to love thee forever. I am not worthy of thy love, which I have hitherto so much despised. But thou hast said, "I love them that love me." — Prov. viii. I love thee; love me, then, O Lord. I do not wish to be any longer in enmity with thee. I renounce all the grandeurs and pleasures of the world, provided thou lovest me. Hear me, O my God, for the love of Jesus Christ. He entreats thee not to banish me from thy heart. To thee I consecrate my whole being; to thee I consecrate my life, my pleasures, my

senses, my soul, my body, my will, and my liberty. Accept me; reject not my offering, as I have deserved for having so often refused thy friendship. *Cast me not away from thy face.* Most holy Virgin, my mother, Mary, pray to Jesus for me. In your intercession I place unbounded confidence.

SECOND POINT.

"There is a deceitful balance in his hand." — Osee xii. 7. We must weigh things in the balance of God, and not in the deceitful balance of the world. The goods of this life are miserable goods; they do not content the heart; they soon end. "My days have been swifter than a post: they have passed by as ships carrying fruits." — Job ix. 25, 26. The days of our life pass and fly away; and of all the pleasures of this earth, what remains? They have passed like a ship, which leaves no trace behind. "As a ship that passeth through the waters, whereof, when it is gone by, the trace cannot be found." — Wis. v. 10. Ask so many of the rich and learned of the world, so many princes and emperors who are now in eternity, what they possess of all the pomps, and delights, and grandeur, which they enjoyed in this life. They all answer "Nothing, nothing." O man, says St. Augustine, "*you attend to what he had here; but attend to what he brings with him.*" — Serm. xiii. de Adv. Dom. "You," says the saint, "regard only the goods which the rich man possessed; but observe what he takes with him at death — a fetid body and a rag of a garment to rot with him."

After death, the grandees of the world are spoken of for a little; but they are soon forgotten. "Their memory hath perished with a noise." — Ps. ix. 7

And if they have gone to hell, what do they do and say in that place of woe? They weep and say, "What hath pride profited us? or what advantage hath the boasting of riches brought us? All those things are passed away like a shadow."—Wis. v. 8, 9. What have our pomps and riches profited us, now that they are passed away like a shadow, and for us nothing remains but eternal torments, wailing, and despair?

"The children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light."—Luke xvi. 8. How prudent are worldlings in earthly affairs! What toils do they endure in order to obtain a situation or to acquire an estate! With what care do they attend to the preservation of bodily health! They adopt the safest means, they select the best physicians, the best remedies, and the purest air. But how careless are they about the concerns of the soul! And it is certain that health, situations, and possessions shall one day end; but the soul and eternity are everlasting. "Intueamur," says St. Augustine, "quanta homines sustineant pro rebus quas vitiose diligunt." What do not the unjust, the vindictive, and voluptuous endure in order to attain their wicked objects? And will they refuse to suffer any thing for the soul? O God! at the light of the death-candle, at that time of truth, worldlings know and confess their folly. Then they say, "O that I had left the world, and led a life of sanctity." Pope Leo the Eleventh said at the hour of death, "*It were better for me to have been porter in my convent, than to be pope.*" Honorius the Third also said in his last illness, "*It would have been better for me to have remained in the kitchen of my monastery to wash the plates, than to be chosen head of the church.*" In his dying moments, Philip

the Second, king of Spain, sent for his son, and throwing off his royal robes, showed him his breast eaten away by worms, and said to him, "Prince, behold how we die, and how the grandeurs of this world end. O," he exclaimed, "that I had been a lay brother in some religious community, and had not been king." He then ordered a cross to be fastened to his neck by means of a cord, and having made all his arrangements for death, he said to his son, "I wished you to be present at this scene, that you may see how the world treats monarchs in the end. Their death is like that of the poorest peasant. In fine, he who leads the most holy life is in the greatest favor with God." This same son, who was afterwards Philip the Third, dying at the age of forty-three years, said, "My subjects, in the sermon to be delivered at my funeral, preach nothing but this spectacle which you behold; say that to have been king serves at death to excite regret and pain." He then exclaimed, "O that I had never been a king. O that I had lived in a desert to serve God. I should now go with greater confidence to present myself at his tribunal, and should not now find myself in so much danger of being damned forever." But these desires at the hour of death serve only to increase the anguish and despair of those who have not loved God. "Then," says St. Teresa, "we should make no account of what ends with life; the true life consists in living in such a manner as not to have any reason to fear death." If, then, we wish to seek the true value of earthly things, let us look at them from the bed of death, and say, These honors, these amusements, these revenues shall one day have an end; we ought then to labor to become saints, and rich in goods which

shall accompany us to the other world, and shall make us content and happy for all eternity.

Affections and Prayers.

Ah, my Redeemer, thou hast suffered so many pains and ignominies for my sake; and I have loved the pleasures and vanities of this earth to such an excess, that, for the sake of them, I have often trampled on thy grace. But, since thou didst not cease to seek after me when I despised thee, I cannot, O my Jesus, fear that thou wilt now cast me away, when I seek and love thee with my whole heart, and am more sorry for having offended thee than I should be for having suffered every other misfortune. O God of my soul, from this day forward I wish never to offend thee, even by a venial thought. Make known to me what is displeasing to thee. I will not, for any earthly good, do what I know to be offensive to thee. Make known to me what I must do in order to please thee. I am ready to do it. I wish to love thee with a true love. I embrace, O Lord, all the pains and crosses which shall come to me from thy hands; give me the resignation I stand in need of: *here burn, here cut.* Chastise me in this life, that in the next I may be able to love thee for eternity. Mary, my mother, to you I recommend my soul; do not ever cease to pray to Jesus for me.

THIRD POINT.

"The time is short; it remaineth that .... they that use this world, *be* as if they used it not; for the fashion of this world passeth away." — 1 Cor vii. 29, 31. What is our life on this earth but a scene, which passes away and ends very soon? *The*

fashion of this world passeth away. The world, says Cornelius a Lapide, is like a stage; one generation passes away, another comes. He who acts the part of a king, takes not the purple with him. Tell me, O villa, O house, how many masters have you had? When the comedy is over, the king is no longer king; the master ceases to be master. You at present are in possession of such a villa and palace; but death shall come, and they shall pass to other masters.

"The affliction of an hour maketh one forget great delights." — Eccl. xi. 29. The gloomy hour of death brings to an end and makes us forget all the grandeur, nobility, and pomps of the world. Casimir, king of Poland, while he sat at table with the grandees of his kingdom, died in the act of raising a cup to take a draught; and the scene ended for him. In seven days after his election, the emperor Celsus was killed, and the scene closed for Celsus. Ladislaus, king of Poland, in his eighteenth year, while he was preparing for the reception of his spouse, the daughter of the king of France, was suddenly seized with a violent pain, which soon deprived him of life. Couriers were instantly despatched to announce to her that the scene was over for Ladislaus, and that she might return to France. By meditating on the vanity of the world, Francis Borgia became a saint. At the sight of the empress Isabella, who had died in the midst of worldly grandeur and in the flower of youth, he, as has been already said, resolved to give himself entirely to God. "Thus, then," he said, "end the grandeur and crowns of this world; I will henceforth serve a Master who can never die."

Let us endeavor to live in such a manner that what was said to the fool in the gospel may not be said

to us at the hour of death, — "Thou fool, this night do they require thy soul of thee; and whose shall those things be which thou hast provided?" — Luke xii. 20. Hence the Redeemer adds, "So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich towards God." — ver. 21. Again he tells you to acquire the riches, not of the world, but of God; — of virtues and merits, which are goods that shall remain with you for eternity in heaven. "Lay up to yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither the rust nor the moth doth consume." — Matt. vi. 20. Let us then labor to acquire the great treasure of divine love. "What," says St. Augustine, "has the rich man, if he has not charity? What does the poor man want, if he has charity?" If a man had all the riches in the world, and has not God, he is the poorest of men. But the poor man who possesses God possesses all things. And who are they that possess God? "He," says St. John, "that abideth in charity, abideth in God, and God in him." — 1 John iv. 16.

Affections and Prayers.

Ah, my God, I do not wish that the devil have any longer dominion over my soul; I wish that thou alone be the Lord and Master of it. I will renounce all things in order to acquire thy grace. I esteem it more than a thousand thrones and a thousand kingdoms. And whom shall I love but thee, who art infinitely amiable, who art an infinite good, infinite beauty, bounty, and love? Hitherto I have abandoned thee for the sake of creatures; this is, and always shall be, to me a source of sorrow, which will pierce my heart with grief for having offended thee, who hast loved me with so much tenderness. But since thou hast favored me with so

many graces, I can no longer bear to see myself without thy love. O my Love, take possession of my whole will, and of all that I possess, and do with me what thou pleasest. If I have hitherto been impatient under adversity, I ask pardon. O my Lord, I will never complain of thy arrangements; I know that they are all holy, all for my welfare. Treat me, O my God, as thou wishest; I promise to be always content, always to thank thee. Make me love thee, and I ask no more. What goods, what honors, what world can I love? O God! O God! I wish only for God. Happy thee, O Mary, who loved nothing in the world but God. Obtain for me the grace to imitate thee, at least during the remainder of my life. In thee I trust.

FOURTEENTH CONSIDERATION.

THE PRESENT LIFE IS A JOURNEY TO ETERNITY.

"Man shall go into the house of his eternity."—Eccl. xii. 5.

FIRST POINT.

SEEING that on this earth so many miscreants wallow in prosperity, and that so many saints live in tribulations, the very Gentiles, by the sole aid of the light of nature, have known this truth—that, since there is a just God, there must be another life, in which the wicked are punished and the good rewarded. But what the Gentiles learned by the light of reason, we Christians know by faith. "We have not here a lasting city; but we seek one

that is to come." — Heb. xiv. 14. This earth is not our country; it is for us a place of passage, from which we shall soon go to the house of eternity. "Man shall go into the house of his eternity." The house, then, dear reader, which you inhabit, is not your house; it is a hospital, from which you shall soon, and when you least expect, be dislodged. Remember that, when the time of death shall have arrived, your dearest relatives will be the first to banish you from it. And what shall be your true house? The house of your body shall be a grave, in which it will remain till the day of judgment; but your soul shall go to the house of eternity — either to heaven or to hell. St. Augustine tells you that *you are a stranger, a traveller, a spectator.* "*Hospes es, transis et vides.*" It would be foolishness in a traveller to spend all his patrimony in purchasing a villa or a house in a country through which he merely passes, and which he must leave in a few days. "Reflect," says the saint, "that in this world you are only on a journey; fix not your affections on what you see; look and pass on, and labor to procure a good house, in which you shall have to dwell forever."

Happy you, if you save your soul! O, how delightful is heaven! All the princely palaces of this world are but stables compared with the city of paradise, which alone can be called *the city of perfect beauty* — "*civitas perfecti decoris.*" — Ezek. xxiii. 3. There you shall have nothing to desire; for you shall be in the society of the saints, of the divine mother, and of Jesus Christ, and shall be free from all fear of evil; in a word, you shall live in a sea of delights, and in unceasing joy, which shall last forever. "Everlasting joy shall be upon their heads." — Isa. xxxv. 10. This joy shall be so great,

that at every moment for all eternity it shall appear new. But unhappy you, if you are lost! You shall be confined in a sea of fire and of torments, in despair, abandoned by all, and without God. And for how long? Perhaps, after the lapse of a hundred thousand years, your pains shall have an end? A hundred and a thousand millions of years and ages shall pass by, and your hell shall be always at its commencement. What are a thousand years compared with eternity? Less than a day which is gone by. "A thousand years in thy sight are as yesterday, which is past." — Ps. lxxxix. 4. Would you wish to know the house which shall be your dwelling for eternity? It shall be that which you merit, and which you choose for yourself by your works.

Affections and Prayers.

Then, O Lord, behold the house which I have deserved by the life which I led. Alas! it is hell; in which, from the first sin I have committed, I ought to dwell, abandoned by thee, and without having it ever in my power to love thee. Blessed forever be thy mercy, which has waited for me, and which now gives me time to repair the evil I have done. O my God, I will no longer abuse thy patience. I am sorry above all things for having offended thee, not so much because I have merited hell, as because I have outraged thy infinite goodness. Never more, my God, never more will I rebel against thee; I desire death rather than offend thee. O my Sovereign Good, were I now in hell, I could never love thee, nor couldst thou love me. I love thee, and wish to be loved by thee; this I do not deserve; but Jesus merits it, because he has offered himself to thee in sacrifice on the

cross, that thou mightst be able to pardon and love me. Eternal Father, give me then, for the sake of thy Son, the grace to love thee, and to love thee intensely. I love thee, O my Father, who hast given me thy Son. I love thee, O Son of God, who hast died for me. I love thee, O mother of Jesus, who, by thy intercession, hast obtained for me time for repentance. O Mary, obtain for me sorrow for my sins, the love of God, and holy perseverance.

SECOND POINT.

"If the tree fall, to the south or to the north, in what place soever it shall fall, there shall it be." — Eccl. xi. 3. Wheresoever the tree of your soul shall fall at death, there shall it remain forever. There is no medium; you shall be forever a king in heaven, or a slave in hell; forever in bliss, in an ocean of delights; or forever in despair, in a pit of torments. In contemplating the fate of the rich glutton, who was esteemed happy in this world because he was rich, but was afterwards confined in hell; and the condition of Lazarus, who was considered to be miserable because he was poor, but was afterwards raised to the glory of heaven; St. John Chrysostom exclaimed, O unhappy felicity, which dragged the rich man to eternal misery! O happy infelicity, which brought the poor Lazarus to the happiness of eternity! "O infelix felicitas, quæ divitem ad æternam infelicitatem traxit! O felix infelicitas, quæ pauperem ad æternitatis felicitatem perduxit!"

Of what use is it to torture yourself, as some do, saying, "Who knows whether I am among the predestined or not?" When the tree is cut down, where does it fall? It falls on the side to which it inclines. Brother, to what side do you incline?

What sort of life do you lead? Labor always to incline to the south; preserve your soul in the grace of God; fly from sin; and thus you shall save your soul, and shall be predestined. And in order to avoid sin, keep always before your eyes the thought of eternity, which St. Augustine called the great thought. *Magna cogitatio.* This thought has led so many young men to abandon the world, and to live in deserts, in order to attend only to the care of the soul; and they have secured eternal life. And, now that they are saved, they shall rejoice for all eternity at having sought, during life, nothing but the salvation of their souls.

Father M. Avila converted a certain lady, who lived at a distance from God, by saying to her, "*Madam, reflect on these two words — always and never.*" In consequence of a thought which he had one day of eternity, Father Paul Segneri could not sleep for several nights; and from that day forward he gave himself up to a more rigorous life. Dresselius relates that a certain bishop was encouraged to lead a holy life by the thought of eternity, and by repeating within himself, "Omni momento ad ostium æternitatis sto." *I stand every moment at the gate of eternity.* A certain monk shut himself up in a cave, and did nothing else but exclaim, "*O eternity! O eternity!*" "He," said Father Avila, "who believes in eternity, and does not become a saint, should be confined in a mad-house."

Affections and Prayers.

Ah, my God, have mercy on me. I know that in committing sin I condemned myself to an eternity of torments; and I have been content to resist thy will, and to incur this punishment. Ah, my Lord, pardon me; I am sorry for it from the

bottom of my heart. I do not wish ever more to oppose thy holy will. How miserable should I be, hadst thou taken me out of life during my career of sin! I should at this moment be condemned to remain forever in hell, to hate thy will. But now I love it, and wish forever to love it. Teach me, and give me strength henceforth to do thy will. I will no longer resist thee, O Infinite Goodness! This grace only do I ask — "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Enable me to do thy will perfectly, and I ask nothing more. And what, O my God, dost thou desire, but my welfare and my salvation? Ah, eternal Father, hear my prayer, for the love of Jesus Christ, who has taught me to pray continually to thee. In his name I ask this grace — *Thy will be done; thy will be done.* Happy me, if I spend the remainder of my life, and if I end my days, doing thy will. O Mary, happy thee, who always did the will of God perfectly, obtain for me, through thy intercession, the grace to do his will during the remainder of my life.

THIRD POINT.

"*Man shall go into the house of his eternity.*" The prophet says *man shall go*, to show that each shall go to the house to which he wishes to go; he shall not be carried to it, but shall go of his own accord. It is certain that God wills the salvation of all men, but he will not save us by force. He has placed before each of us life and death; whichsoever we choose shall be given us. "That which he shall choose shall be given him." — Eccl. xv. 18. Jeremiah likewise says that the Lord has given us two ways in which to walk — one the way of heaven, the other the way of hell. "Behold, I

set before you the way of life and the way of death." — Jer. xxi. 8. The choice rests with us. But how shall he who wishes to walk in the way of hell be able to reach heaven? All sinners wish for salvation, and in the mean time they, by their own choice, condemn themselves to hell, with the hope of being afterwards saved. But who, says St. Augustine, can be found so foolish as to take poison with the hope of escaping death? "Nemo vult ægrotare sub spe salutis." And still so many Christians, so many fools, kill their souls by sin, saying, "I will hereafter think of a remedy." O delusion, which has sent so many souls to hell! Let us not be so foolish; let us reflect that eternity is at stake. In erecting a house in which he expects to live for the remainder of his life, a man spares no trouble in seeking a healthful site, and submits to great toil and fatigue in endeavoring to make the house commodious and airy. And why are men so careless when there is question of the house in which they must dwell for eternity? "Negotium pro quo contendimus," says St. Eucherius, "æternitas est." The business for which we labor is eternity; there is not question of a house more or less commodious, more or less airy; but there is question of being in a place full of delights, among the friends of God, or in a pit of torments, in the midst of an infamous crowd of abandoned miscreants. And for how long? Not for twenty nor forty years, but for all eternity. This is a great point; it is not a business of little moment; it is an affair of infinite importance. When Thomas More was condemned to die by Henry the Eighth, his wife, Louisa, went to him for the purpose of prevailing on him to yield to the wishes of the king. He said to her, "Tell me,

Louisa, how many years could I, who am now so old, expect to live?" "You might," replied Louisa, "live for twenty years more." "O foolish woman," rejoined the holy man, "do you want me, for twenty years of life on this earth, to forfeit an eternity of happiness, and to condemn myself to an eternity of torments?"

O God, give me light. If eternity were a doubtful matter, or only resting on a probable opinion, we ought to make every effort in our power to lead a good life, lest, should the doctrine of eternity be true, we should expose ourselves to the danger of being eternally miserable; but it is not doubtful, but infallibly certain; not a mere opinion, but a truth of faith. "Man shall go into the house of his eternity." "Alas!" says St. Teresa, "the want of faith is the cause of so many sins, and of the damnation of so many Christians." Let us then always enliven our faith, saying, "I believe in life everlasting." I believe that after this life there is another, which never ends. And with this thought always before our eyes, let us adopt the means of securing eternal salvation. Let us frequent the sacraments; let us make meditation every day; and let us reflect on eternal life; let us fly from dangerous occasions; and, if necessary, let us leave the world; for, to make ourselves sure of eternal life, no security can be too great. "Nulla nimia securitas ubi periclitatur æternitas." — St. Bernard.

Affections and Prayers.

Then, my God, there is no medium; I must be forever happy, or forever miserable; either in a sea of joys, or in a sea of torments; either forever with thee in heaven, or forever separated at a distance

from thee in hell. And this hell I know for certain that I have so often deserved; but I also know for certain that thou dost pardon all who repent, and that thou rescuest from hell all who hope in thee. Of this thou assurest me — "He shall cry to me . . . . I will pardon him, and will glorify him." — Ps. xc. 15. Pardon me then, O Lord; pardon me immediately, and deliver me from hell. O Sovereign Good, I am sorry above all things for having offended thee. Restore to me thy grace as soon as possible, and give me thy holy love. Were I now in hell, I could never more love thee; I should have to hate thee forever. Ah, my God, what evil hast thou done to me, that I should hate thee? Thou hast loved me unto death. Thou art worthy of infinite love. O Lord, do not permit me to be ever separated from thee. I love thee, and will always love thee. "Who shall separate me from the charity of Christ?" Ah, my Jesus, sin alone can separate me from thee. Ah! through the blood which thou hast shed for me, do not permit me to be ever separated from thee. Strike me dead rather than suffer me to lose thy love. "Do not permit me to be separated from thee." Mary, my queen and my mother, assist me by thy prayers; obtain for me death and a thousand deaths, rather than that I should be separated from the love of thy Son.

FIFTEENTH CONSIDERATION.

ON THE MALICE OF MORTAL SIN.

"I have brought up children and exalted them; but they have despised me."—Isa. i. 2.

FIRST POINT.

What does the sinner do when he commits mortal sin? He insults God, he dishonors him, he afflicts him. In the first place, mortal sin is an insult offered to God. The malice of an insult is, as St. Thomas says, estimated from the condition of the person who receives and of the person who offers the insult. It is sinful to offend a peasant; it is more criminal to insult a nobleman; but to treat a monarch with contempt and insolence, is a still greater crime. Who is God? "He is Lord of lords and king of kings."—Apoc. xvii. 14. He is a Being of infinite majesty, before whom all the princes of the earth, and all the saints and angels, are less than an atom of sand. "As a drop of a bucket . . . . as a little dust."—Isa xl. 15. The prophet Osee adds, that, compared with the greatness of God, all creatures are as insignificant as if they did not exist. "All nations," he says, "are before him as if they had no being at all."—ver. 17. Such is God; and what is man? He is, according to St. Bernard, a heap of worms, the food of worms, by which he shall be soon devoured. "Saccus vermium, cibus vermium." He is "miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked."—Apoc. iii. 17. Man is a miserable worm, that can do nothing; he is so blind that he knows nothing, and so poor and naked that he possesses

nothing. And this miserable worm voluntarily insults a God! "Vile dust," says the same St. Bernard, "dares to provoke such tremendous majesty." The angelic doctor, then, had just reason to say that the sin of man contains, as it were, an infinite malice. "Peccatum habet quandam infinitatem malitiæ ex infinitate divinæ majestatis." — P. 3, q. 2, c. 2, ad. 2. And St. Augustine calls sin "an infinite evil." Hence, were all men and angels to offer themselves to death and annihilation, the oblation should not satisfy for a single sin. God punishes sin with the pains of hell; but all theologians teach that this chastisement is less than sin deserves.

And what punishment can be sufficient for a worm who assails his Lord? God is the Lord of all, because he has created all. "All things are in thy power. . . . Thou hast made heaven, and earth, and all things." — Est. xiii. 9. All creatures obey God. "The winds," says St. Matthew, "and the sea obey him." — Matt. viii. 27. "Fire, hail, snow, ice, stormy winds, which fulfil his will." — Ps. cxlviii. 8. But when man sins, what does he do? He says to God, Lord, I will not serve thee. "Thou hast broken my yoke; thou hast burst my bonds; thou saidst, I will not serve." — Jer. ii. 20. The Lord says to him, Seek not revenge; take not that property which belongs to another; abstain from that unchaste gratification. But man answers, I will have revenge; I will take possession of that property; I will indulge in that forbidden pleasure. Like Pharaoh, when Moses, on the part of God, commanded him to allow the people to go into the desert, the sinner answers, "Who is the Lord, that I should hear his voice, and let Israel go?" — Exod. v. 2. The sinner says the

same — Lord, I know you not; I will do what I please. In a word, he insults the Lord to his face, and turns his back upon him. Mortal sin is precisely a turning away from God. "Aversio ab incommutabili bono." — St. Thom. part i. q. 24, art. 4. Of this the Lord himself complains — "Thou hast forsaken me, saith the Lord; thou art gone backward." — Jer. xv. 6. You have, says God, been ungrateful to me; you have abandoned me, you have turned your back upon me; you "*are gone backward.*" God has declared that he hates sin. Hence he cannot but hate the sinner who commits it. "But to God the wicked and his wickedness are hateful alike." Wis. xiv. 9. In committing sin, man dares to declare himself the enemy of God, and to contend single-handed with the Lord. "He hath," says Job, "strengthened himself against the Almighty." — Job xv. 25. What would you say if you saw an insect attack an armed soldier? God is the Omnipotent Being who by a nod has "created heaven and earth out of nothing." — 2 Mach. vii. 28. And if he wish, he can, by another act of his will, destroy all creatures. "The almighty Lord, who, at a beck, can utterly destroy . . . . the whole world." — 2 Mach. viii. 18. In consenting to sin, the sinner stretches out his arms against the Lord. "He hath," says Job, "stretched out his hand against God. He hath run against him with his neck raised up, and is armed with a fat neck." — Job xv. 26. He raises his neck, that is, he swells with pride, and runs to insult God; he arms himself with a fat neck, that is, with ignorance; for a fat neck is the symbol of ignorance, of that ignorance which makes the sinner say, *What harm have I done? What great evil is that sin which I have committed? God*

is merciful — he pardons sinners. What an insult! What temerity! What blindness!

Affections and Prayers.

Behold, O my God! at thy feet the rash and daring rebel, who has had the temerity and audacity to insult thee so often to thy very face, and to turn his back upon thee. Thou hast said, "Cry to me, and I will hear." — Jer. xxxiii. 3. Hell is too little for me; this I already know. But remember, O Lord, that I am more sorry for having offended thee, who art infinite goodness, than I would be for the loss of all my property and of my life. Ah, Lord, pardon me, and do not permit me ever to offend thee more. Thou hast waited for me that I may forever bless thy mercy and love thee. Yes, I bless thee, I love thee, and I hope, through the merits of Jesus Christ, that I shall never again be separated from thy love; thy love has rescued me from hell; it is by thy love that I am to be preserved from sin for the future. I thank thee, my Lord, for the light and the desire thou dost give me to love thee forever. Ah! take possession of my whole being — of my soul and body — of my powers and senses — of my will and liberty. "I am thine — save me." Thou art my only good; thou art alone amiable; mayst thou also be my only love. Give me fervor in loving thee. I have offended thee grievously. Hence it is not enough for me to love thee; I wish to love thee ardently, in order to compensate the injuries I have done thee. From thee, who art omnipotent, I hope for this love. I also hope for it through thy prayers, O Mary, which art powerful before God.

SECOND POINT.

The sinner not only insults, but he also dishonors God. "By the transgression of the law thou dishonorest God." — Rom. ii. 23. Yes; for he renounces God's grace, and for a miserable pleasure he tramples on the friendship of God. Were man to forfeit the divine friendship, in order to gain a kingdom, or even the entire world, he should do a great evil; for the friendship of God is more valuable than the world, and even a thousand worlds. But for what does the sinner insult the Lord? "Wherefore hath the wicked provoked God?" — Ps. x. 13. For a little earth, for the gratification of revenge, for a beastly pleasure, for the indulgence of vanity or caprice. "They violated me among my people for a handful of barley and a piece of bread." — Ez. xiii. 19. When the sinner deliberates whether he will give or refuse his consent to sin, he, as it were, takes in his hand a balance, and examines whether the grace of God has more or less weight than indulgence of his passion, vanity, or pleasure; and when he consents to sin, he declares that his passion, vanity, or pleasure, is of greater value than the friendship of God. Behold the Lord covered with shame by the sinner! Contemplating the greatness and majesty of God, David said, "Lord, who is like to thee?" — Ps. xxxiv. 10. But seeing sinners compare and prefer a miserable gratification to his friendship, the Lord exclaimed, "To whom have you likened me, or made me equal?" — Isa. xl. 25. Then, he says, was that vile pleasure of greater value than my grace? "Thou hast cast me off behind thy back." — Ez. xxiii. 35. Were you to forfeit a hand, or ten ducats, or even a much smaller sum, you would not have committed that

sin. Then, says Salvian, is God alone so contemptible in your eyes, that he deserves to be despised for the indulgence of a passion, or for a miserable satisfaction? "Deus solus in comparatione omnium tibi vilis fuit."

Moreover, by offending God for the sake of his pleasure, the sinner makes that pleasure his god, by making it his last end. St. Jerome says, "Unusquisque quod cupit, si veneratur, hoc illi Deus est: vitium in corde est idolum in altari." What a person desires, if he worships it, is to him a god. A vice in the heart is an idol on the altar. Hence St. Thomas says, "If you love delights, delights are your god." And according to St. Cyprian, "whatever man prefers to God, that he makes a god to himself." When Jeroboam rebelled against the Lord, he endeavored to draw the people with him into idolatry. Hence he placed before them his idols, saying, "Behold thy gods, O Israel."—3 Kings xii. 28. It is thus the devil acts; he represents a certain pleasure to the sinner, and says, *Make this your god; behold this pleasure; this revenge is your god; adhere to them, and forsake the Lord.* And in consenting to sin, the sinner obeys the devil, and in his heart adores as his god the pleasure which he indulges. "A vice in the heart is an idol on the altar." If the sinner dishonors God, he surely does not dishonor him in his presence. O, he insults and dishonors God to his very face; for God is present in all places. "Do I not fill heaven and earth, saith the Lord."—Jer. xxiii. 24. This sinners know, and still they dare to provoke God before his eyes. "They provoke me to anger before my face."—Isa. lxv. 3.

Affections and Prayers.

Then, my God, thou art an infinite good, and I have frequently exchanged thee for a miserable pleasure, which I had scarcely indulged when it vanished. But thou, though despised by me, now offerest me pardon, if I wish for it, and thou dost promise to give me thy grace if I repent of having offended thee. Yes, my Lord, I repent with my whole heart of having outraged thee so grievously; I detest my sins above all things. Behold, I already return to thee, as I hope, and thou dost already receive me, and embrace me as thy child. I thank thee, O infinite Goodness; but assist me now, and do not permit me ever again to banish thee from my heart. Hell shall not cease to tempt me; but thou art more powerful than hell. I know that I shall never more abandon thee, if I always recommend myself to thee. The grace, then, which I ask is, that I may always recommend myself to thee, and that I may always say to thee, as I now do, Lord, assist me; give me light, give me strength, give me perseverance, give me paradise; but, above all, give me thy love, which is the true paradise of souls. I love thee, O infinite Goodness, and I wish always to love thee. Hear me for the love of Jesus Christ. Mary, thou art the refuge of sinners; assist, by thy prayers, a sinner who wishes to love thy God.

THIRD POINT.

The sinner insults God, he dishonors God, and fills the heart of God with grief and bitterness. There is nothing more galling than to be treated with ingratitude by a person tenderly loved and highly favored. Whom does the sinner assail? He

insults a God who has created him, and has loved him so as to give his blood and his life for his salvation; and by committing mortal sin, he banishes God from his heart. God comes to dwell in the soul that loves him. "If any one love me, ... my Father will love him, and we will come to him, and will make our abode with him." — John xiv. 23. Mark the words — *we will make our abode with him.* God comes to dwell forever in the soul; he never departs from her, unless he is driven away. According to the Council of Trent, "he deserts not the soul, unless he is deserted." But, O Lord, you know that the ungrateful sinner shall, in a few moments, banish you; why do you not instantly depart from him? Will you wait till he expels you? Abandon him — depart from him before he offers you this great insult. No, says the Lord, I will not depart till he himself chases me away.

Then, in consenting to sin, the soul says to God, Lord, depart from me. "The wicked," says Job, "have said to God, Depart from us." — Job xxi. 14. The sinner, according to St. Gregory, says the same. not in words, but by acts. "Recede, non verbis, sed moribus." The sinner knows that God cannot dwell with sin: in yielding to sin, he sees that God must depart: hence, by his conduct, he says to God, Since you cannot remain in me along with my sin, depart — farewell. And through the very door, by which God leaves the soul, the devil enters. "Then he goeth and taketh with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there." — Matt. xii. 45. In baptizing an infant, the priest commands the devil to depart. "Go out from him, unclean spirit, and make room for the Holy Ghost." Yes; for the soul, by receiving the grace of God, becomes his

temple. "Know you not," says St. Paul, "that you are the temple of God?" — 1 Cor. iii. 16. But, in consenting to sin, man does the very contrary: he says to God, who is in his soul, "*Go out from me, O Lord, make room for the devil.*" Of this the Lord complained to St. Bridget, saying, that he is treated by the sinner as a king expelled from his throne. "I am like a monarch banished from his own dominions; and in my place the worst of plunderers is chosen."

What pain should you feel if you received a grievous insult from a person on whom you had lavished favors? This is the pain which you have given to your God, who laid down his life for your salvation. The Lord calls heaven and earth to pity him on account of the ingratitude of sinners. "Hear, O ye heavens, and give ear, O earth. . . . . I have brought up children and exalted them, but they have despised me." — Isa. i. 2. In a word, by their iniquities sinners afflict the heart of God. "But they provoked to wrath, and afflicted the spirit of the Holy One." — Isa. lxiii. 10. God is not susceptible of pain; but were he capable of sorrow, a single mortal sin should, as Father Medina teaches, be sufficient to make him die through pure grief. "Mortal sin would, were it possible, destroy God himself, because it would be the cause of infinite sadness in God." — Medina on Penance. Thus, as St. Bernard says, "Sin, as far as in it lies, destroys God." In committing mortal sin, the sinner, as it were, gives poison to God, and does all in his power to deprive him of life. "The sinner," says David, "hath provoked the Lord." — Ps. x. 4. And according to St. Paul, he "tramples on the Son of God." — Heb. x. 29. For he despises all that Jesus Christ has done and suffered in order to take away the sins of the world.

Affections and Prayers.

Then, my Redeemer, as often as I have sinned, I have banished thee from my soul, and have done what would, were it possible for thee to die, have taken away thy life. I now hear thee ask, "*What evil have I done thee? Tell me. What displeasure have I given thee, that thou shouldst offer me so many insults?*" Lord, thou hast given me existence, and hast died for me. Behold the evil thou hast done me. What answer, then, can I make? I say that I have deserved a thousand hells; thou hast just grounds for sending me to everlasting torments. But remember the love which made thee die on the cross for my salvation; remember the blood which thou hast shed for my sake, and have mercy on me. But I know thou dost not wish that I despair; on the contrary, thou makest me feel that thou standest at the door of my heart, and that, by thy inspirations, thou knockest for admission. "*I stand at the gate and knock.*" You tell me to open. "*Open to me, my sister.*" — Cant. v. 2. Yes, my Jesus, I banish sin from my soul: I am sorry for it with my whole heart, and I love thee above all things. Enter, O my Love; the gate is open; enter, and never more depart from me. Bind me to thyself by thy love, and do not permit me to be ever separated from thee. No, my God, we will never again be disunited; I embrace thee, and unite thee to my heart: give me holy perseverance. "*Do not permit me to be separated from thee.*" Mary, my mother, assist me always; pray to Jesus for me; obtain for me this favor, that I may never more lose his grace.

SIXTEENTH CONSIDERATION.

ON THE MERCY OF GOD.

"Mercy exalteth itself above judgment."—St. James ii 13.

FIRST POINT.

Good is naturally diffusive; that is, inclined to communicate its goods even to others. But God, who is by nature infinite goodness, ("Deus cujus natura bonitas."—St. Leo,) has an infinite desire to impart his own felicity to us; and therefore his inclination is, not to chastise, but to show mercy to all. To punish is, according to Isaiah, a work opposed to the inclination of God. "He shall be angry, ... that he may do his work, his strange work; his work is strange to him."—Isa. xxviii. 21. And when the Lord chastises in this life, he does it in order to show mercy in the next. "O God, ... thou hast been angry, and hast had mercy on us."—Ps. lix. 3. He appears angry, that we may enter into ourselves, and detest our sins. "Thou hast shown thy people hard things; thou hast made us drink the wine of sorrow."—Ps. lix. 5. And when he sends us any chastisement, he does it because he loves us, and wishes to deliver us from eternal punishment. "Thou hast given a warning to them that fear thee, that they may flee from before the bow, that thy beloved may be delivered."—ver. 6. And who can sufficiently admire and praise the mercy of God towards sinners in waiting for them, in calling them, and in receiving them when they return? O, how great is the mercy of God in waiting for our re-

pentance! My brother, when you offended God, he could have struck you dead; but he waited for you, and, instead of chastising you, he conferred favors upon you, he preserved your life, and provided for you. He pretended not to see your sins, that you might repent. "Thou overlookest the sins of men for the sake of penance." — Wis. xi. 24. But, O Lord, how does it happen that you cannot bear to behold a single sin, and that you witness so many of them in silence? "Thou canst not look on iniquity; why lookest thou upon them that do unjust things, and holdest thy peace?" — Hab. i. 13. You behold the blasphemer, the unchaste, the vindictive man, multiplying iniquities from day to day; and you do not chastise him; and why so much patience? "Therefore the Lord waiteth, that he may have mercy on you." — Isa. xxx. 18. God waits for sinners, that they may amend, and that thus he may pardon and save them. St. Thomas says, that all creatures, fire, the earth, air, water, by a natural instinct, would wish to punish and to take vengeance on the injuries done to their Creator. "Omnis creatura tibi deserviens excandescit adversus injustos." But God, in his mercy, restrains them. But, O Lord, you wait for these impious wretches, that they may see their wickedness; but do you not see that they ungratefully take advantage of your mercy to offend you still more? "Thou hast been favorable to the nation; thou hast been favorable to the nation; art thou glorified?" — Isa. xxvi. 15. And why so much patience? Because "God wills not the death of the sinner, but that he be converted and live." Ez. xxxiii. 11. O patience of God! St. Augustine goes so far as to say that God, were he not God, should be unjust on account of his

excessive patience towards sinners. "Deus, Deus meus, pace tua dicam, nisi quia Deus esses, injustus esses." To wait for those who abuse patience to become more insolent, appears to be an injustice to the divine honor. "*We sin*," continues the holy doctor, "*we adhere to sin.*" Some make peace with sin, and sleep in sin for months and years. *We rejoice at sin:* others go so far as to boast of their wickedness; *and you are appeased. We provoke you to anger — you invite us to mercy.* We appear to be engaged with God in a contest, in which we labor to provoke him to chastise our guilt; and he invites us to pardon.

Affections and Prayers.

Ah, my Lord, I know that I deserve to be at this moment in hell. "*Hell is my house.*" But through thy mercy, I am not now in that place of woe, but I am here at thy feet, and feel that thou wishest and commandest me to love thee. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God." I hear thee tell me that thou wilt pardon me if I repent of the injuries I have done thee. Yes, my God; since thou wishest me, a miserable rebel against thy majesty, to love thee, I love thee with my whole heart, and I feel more regret for the outrages I have offered to thee, than for any evil that could have befallen me. Ah! enlighten me, O infinite Goodness; make me sensible of the wrongs I have done thee. I will no longer resist thy calls. I will give no more displeasure to a God who has loved me so tenderly, who has pardoned me so often and with so much love. Ah! that I had never offended thee, my Jesus; pardon me, and grant that, from this day forward, I may love nothing but thee; that I may live only for thee, who hast died for me; that I

may suffer for thy love, since thou hast suffered so much for the love of me. Thou hast loved me from eternity; grant that for eternity I may burn with thy love. I hope for all things, O my Savior, through thy merits. I trust also in thee, O Mary; save me by thy intercession.

SECOND POINT.

Consider, moreover, the mercy of God in calling the sinner to repentance. When Adam rebelled against the Lord, and hid himself from his face, behold, God, having lost Adam, goes in search of him, and calls him, as it were with tears, "Adam, where art thou?" — Gen. iii. 10. "These," says Father Pererius, in his commentary on this passage, "are the words of a father seeking a lost son." My brother, God has often done the same to you. You fled from God, and he sought after you, calling you at one time by his inspirations, at another by remorses of conscience, now by sermons, again by tribulations, and by the death of your friends. Speaking of you, Jesus appears to say, "I have labored with crying; my jaws are become hoarse." — Ps. lxviii. 4. My son, I have almost lost my voice in calling you to repentance. Remember, O sinners, says St. Teresa, that that Lord, who shall one day be your Judge, is now calling you to return to him.

Dearly beloved Christian, how often have you been deaf to the calls of God! You deserved that he should call you no more; but your God has not ceased to call you, because he wishes to make peace with you, and to save you. Who was it that called you? A God of infinite majesty. And what were you but a miserable, fetid worm? Why

did he cal. you? For no other purpose than to restore to you the life of grace which you had lost. "Return ye and live." — Ez. xviii. 32. To acquire the divine grace, it would be but little to live in a desert during your entire life. God offered to give you his grace at each moment, if you wished to obtain it by making an act of contrition, and you refused. And after all this, God has not abandoned you; he has gone in search of you, as it were weeping, and saying, Son, why will you bring yourself to perdition? "And why will you die, O house of Israel?" — Ezek. xviii. 31.

When man commits a mortal sin, he banishes God from his soul. The wicked have said to God, "Depart from us." — Job xxi. 14. But what does God do? He places himself at the door of that ungrateful heart. "Behold I stand at the gate and knock." — Apoc. iii. 20. He even appears to entreat the soul to allow him to enter. "Open to me, my sister." — Cant. v. 2. He grows weary praying for admission. "I am weary of entreating thee." — Jer. xv. 9. Yes, says St. Denis the Areopagite, God follows sinners like a despised lover, entreating them not to destroy their souls. "Deus etiam a se aversos amatorie sequitur et deprecatur ne pereant." And this precisely the apostle meant when he wrote to his disciples. "For Christ, we beseech you to be reconciled to God." — 2 Cor. v. 20. In explaining this passage, St. John Chrysostom makes a beautiful reflection. "Ipse Christus vos obsecrat, quid autem obsecrat? Reconciliamini Deo, non enim ipse inimicus gerit, sed vos." Christ himself entreats you; but what does he entreat you to do? To be reconciled to God; for it is not God that acts like an enemy, but you. The saint's meaning is, that the sinner has not to labor in order

to move God to make peace with him; for he, and not God, refuses peace.

Ah! this good Lord goes every day in search of so many sinners, continually saying to them, "Ungrateful souls, do not fly away any longer; tell me why you fly away from me. I love your welfare, and desire nothing else than to make you happy. Why will you destroy yourselves?" But, O Lord, what is it you do? Why so much patience and so much love towards these rebels? What good do you expect from them? It redounds but little to your honor to show such an excess of love for the miserable worms that fly away from you. "What is a man, that thou shouldst magnify him? or why dost thou set thine heart upon him?" — Job vii. 17.

Affections and Prayers.

Behold, O Lord, at thy feet an ungrateful soul imploring mercy. *Father, forgive me.* I call thee Father, because thou wishest me thus to call thee. My Father, pardon me. I do not deserve pity, for I have treated thee with ingratitude because thou hast been bountiful to me. Ah, my God, through that goodness which did not allow thee to abandon me when I fled from thee, receive me, now that I return to thee! Give me, O my Jesus, a great sorrow for the offences I have offered to thee, and give me the kiss of peace. I am sorry above all things for the injuries I have done thee; I detest and abhor them, and I unite this hatred and abhorrence with that which thou, O my Redeemer, feltest for them in the garden of Gethsemani. Ah! pardon me through the merits of that blood which thou sheddest for me in the garden. I promise firmly never more to depart from thee, and to banish from

my heart every affection which is not for thee. My Jesus, my love, I love thee above all things; I wish always to love thee, and to love thee alone; give me strength to execute this good will; make me all thine. O Mary, my hope after Jesus, thou art the mother of mercy; pray to God for me, and have pity on me.

THIRD POINT.

The princes of the earth disdain even to look at the rebel who comes to ask pardon; but God acts not in this manner with us. "He will not turn away his face from you, if you return to him." — 2 Par. xxx. 9. God cannot turn away his face from those who return and cast themselves at his feet; no, for he himself invites them, and promises to receive them as soon as they come. "Return to me, saith the Lord, and I will receive thee." — Jer. iii. 11. "Turn to me.... and I will turn to you, saith the Lord of hosts." — Zac. i. 3. O, with what love and tenderness does God embrace the sinner that returns to him! This love and tenderness Jesus Christ wished to give us to understand by the parable of the sheep, which the shepherd, when he found it, placed on his shoulders. "Doth he not lay it upon his shoulders, rejoicing; and, coming home, call together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, Rejoice with me, because I have found my sheep that was lost?" — Luke xv. 5, 6. The Redeemer adds, "There shall be joy in heaven upon one sinner that doth penance." This tenderness the Savior declared more fully in the parable of the prodigal son; in which he tells us that he is the father who, when he saw his lost son returning, runs to meet him, and before his son utters a word, em-

braces and kisses him, and, in embracing him, almost swoons away through tenderness of consolation. "And running to him, he fell upon his neck and kissed him." — Luke xv. 20.

The Lord promises that, if sinners repent, he will even forget their sins, as if they had never offended him. "If the wicked do penance.... living he shall live..... I will not remember all his iniquities that he hath done." — Ez. xviii. 21. He goes even so far as to say, "Come and accuse me, saith the Lord; if your sins be as scarlet, they shall be made as white as snow." — Isa. i. 18. As if he said, Sinners, *come and accuse me;* if I do not pardon you, reprove me, upbraid me with having been unfaithful to my promises. But no; "God knows not how to despise an humble and contrite heart." — Ps. l. 19.

The Lord glories in showing mercy and granting pardon to sinners. "And therefore shall he be exalted, sparing you." — Isa. xxx. 18. And how long does he defer pardon? Not an instant; he grants it immediately. "Weeping," says the prophet Isaias, "thou shalt not weep; he will surely have pity on thee." — Isa. xxx. 19. Sinners, exclaims the prophet, you have not long to weep; at the first tear the Lord will be moved to pity. "At the voice of thy cry, as soon as he shall hear, he will answer thee." — Ibid. God does not treat us as we treat him; we are deaf to the calls of God; but "*as soon as he shall hear, he will answer thee;*" the very instant you repent and ask forgiveness, God answers and grants your pardon.

Affections and Prayers.

O my God, against whom have I rebelled? Against thee, who art so good, that thou hast cre-

ated me, and died for me. After so many acts of treason, thou hast borne with me. Ah! the thought of the patience thou hast had with me ought to make me live always on fire with thy love. And who would have borne so long as thou hast the injuries which I have done thee? Miserable shall I be, should I ever again offend thee, and condemn myself to hell! I already see that thy mercy can bear with me no longer. I am sorry, O Sovereign Good, for having offended thee. I love thee with my whole heart; I am resolved to give thee all the remainder of my life. Hear me, O Eternal Father, through the merits of Jesus Christ; give me holy perseverance and thy love; hear me, O my Jesus, for the sake of the blood which thou sheddest for me. *We therefore beseech thee, assist thy servants, whom thou hast redeemed with thy precious blood.* O Mary, my mother, look upon me, "*turn thy eyes of mercy to us*," and draw me entirely to God.

SEVENTEENTH CONSIDERATION.

ABUSE OF DIVINE MERCY.

"Knowest thou not that the benignity of God leadeth thee to penance?"—Rom. ii. 4.

FIRST POINT.

We read in the parable of the cockle, that the servants of the good man of the house, seeing that it had grown up in the field along with the wheat, wished to pluck it up. "Wilt thou," said they, "that we go and gather it up?"—St. Matt. xiii.

28. No, replied the master; suffer it to grow up, and then it shall be gathered and cast into the fire. "In the time of the harvest, I will say to the reapers, Gather up first the cockle, and bind it in bundles to burn." — Ibid. ver. 30. In this parable we see, on the one hand, the patience with which the Lord treats sinners; and on the other, the rigor with which he chastises the obstinate. St. Augustine says that the devil deludes men in two ways — *by despair and hope.* After the sinner has offended God, the enemy, by placing before his eyes the terror of divine justice, tempts him to despair; but before he sins, the devil encourages him to sin with the hope of divine mercy. Hence the saint gives to all the following advice: *After sin, hope for mercy; before sin, fear justice.* He who abuses God's mercy to offend him, is undeserving of mercy. God shows mercy to those who fear him, but not to those who avail themselves of his mercy to banish the fear of God from their heart. Abulensis says that he who offends justice may have recourse to mercy; but to whom shall he have recourse, who offends mercy itself?

It is hard to find a sinner so sunk in despair as to wish for his own damnation. Sinners wish to sin, without losing the hope of salvation. They sin and say, "God is merciful; I will commit this sin, and will afterwards confess it." They say, observes St. Augustine, "God is good; I will do what I please." — Tract. xxxiii. in Job. Behold the language of sinners; but, O God, such too was the language of so many who are now in hell.

Say not, says the Lord, that the mercies of God are great; that however enormous your sins may be, you shall obtain pardon by an act of contrition. "And say not, The mercy of the Lord is great;

he will have mercy on the multitude of my sins." — Eccl. v. 6. Say it not, says the Lord; and why? "For mercy and wrath quickly come from him, and his wrath looketh upon sinners." — Ibid. The mercy of God is infinite; but the acts of his mercy, or his mercies, are finite. God is merciful, but he is also just. "I am just and merciful," said our Lord to St. Bridget; "but sinners regard me only as merciful." St. Basil writes that sinners wish to consider God only as good and merciful. "Bonus est Dominus, sed etiam justus, nolimus Deum ex dimidia parte cogitare." To bear with those who avail themselves of the mercy of God to offend him, would not, says Father M. Avila, be mercy, but a want of justice. Mercy is promised, not to those who abuse it, but to those who fear God. "And his mercy," said the divine mother, "to those that fear him." — St. Luke i. 50. Against the obstinate, threats of just retribution have been pronounced; and, says St. Augustine, as God is not unfaithful to his promises, so he is not a liar in his threats. "Qui verus est in promittendo, verus est in minando."

Beware, says St. John Chrysostom, when the devil, not God, promises you divine mercy, that he may induce you to commit sin. "Cave ne umquam canem illum suspicias qui misericordiam Dei pollicetur." — Hom. i. ad Pop. Antioc. Never attend to that dog that promises you the mercy of God. Woe, says St. Augustine, to him who hopes in order to sin. "Sperat ut peccet: væ a perversa spe." — In Ps. cxliv. O, how many, says the saint, has this vain hope deluded and brought to perdition! "They who have been deceived by this shadow of vain hope cannot be numbered." Miserable the man who abuses the mercy of God to offer new insults to his

majesty! St. Bernard says that Lucifer's chastisement was accelerated, because he rebelled against God with the hope of escaping punishment. King Manasses sinned; he afterwards repented, and obtained pardon. His son Ammon, seeing that his father's sins were so easily forgiven, abandoned himself to a wicked life with the hope of pardon; but for Ammon there was no mercy. Hence St. John Chrysostom asserts that Judas was lost because he sinned through confidence in the benignity of Jesus Christ. "Fidit in lenitate Magistri." In fine, God bears, but he does not bear forever. Were God to bear forever with sinners, no one should be damned; but the most common opinion is, that the greater part of adults, even among Christians, are lost. "Wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there are that go in thereat." — Matt. vii. 13.

According to St. Augustine, he who offends God with the hope of pardon, "*is a scoffer, not a penitent.*" But St. Paul tells us that God does not allow himself to be mocked. Gal. vi. 7. To continue to offend God as often and as long as the sinner pleases, and afterwards to gain heaven, should be to mock God. "For what things a man shall sow, those also shall he reap." — Ibid. ver. 8. He that sows sins, has no reason to hope for any thing else than chastisement and hell. The net with which the devil drags to hell almost all Christians who are damned, is the delusion by which he leads them into sin with the hope of pardon. Sin freely, he says to them; for after all your iniquities, you shall be saved. But God curses the man that sins with the hope of mercy. "*Maledictus homo qui peccat in spe.*" The hope of sinners after sin is pleasing to God when it is accompanied with

repentance; but the hope of the obstinate is an abomination to the Lord. — Job xi. 20. As the conduct of a servant who insults his master because he is good and merciful, irritates the master, so such hope provokes God to inflict vengeance.

Affections and Prayers.

Ah, my God, I have been one of those who have offended thee because thou wert bountiful to me. Ah, Lord, wait for me, do not abandon me. I am sorry, O infinite Goodness, for having offended thee, and for having so much abused thy patience. I thank thee for having waited for me till now. Henceforth I will never more betray thee, as I have hitherto done. Thou hast borne with me so long, that thou mightst one day see me a lover of thy goodness. Behold, this day has, I hope, arrived; I love thee above all things, and esteem thy grace more than all the kingdoms of the world: rather than lose it, I am ready to forfeit life a thousand times. My God, for the love of Jesus Christ, give me holy perseverance till death, along with thy holy love. Do not permit me ever again to betray thee, or to cease to love thee. Mary, thou art my hope: obtain for me this gift of perseverance, and I ask nothing more.

SECOND POINT.

Some will say, "God has hitherto shown me so many mercies, I hope he will treat me with the same mercy for the future." But I answer, "And will you insult God again, because he has been so merciful to you?" Then, says St. Paul, do you thus despise the mercy and patience of God? Do you not know that the Lord has borne with you to this

moment, not that you may continue to offend him, but that you may weep over the evil you have done? "Despisest thou the riches of his goodness, and patience, and long-suffering? Knowest thou not that the benignity of God leadeth thee to penance?" — Rom. ii. 4. If, through confidence in the divine mercy, you continue to sin, the Lord will cease to show mercy. "Except you be converted," says David, "he will brandish his sword." — Ps. vii. 13. "Revenge is mine, and I will repay them in *due time*." — Deut. xxxii. 35. God waits, but when the time of chastisement arrives, he waits no longer, but executes vengeance.

"Therefore the Lord waiteth, that he may have mercy on you." — Is. xxx. 18. God waits for sinners, that they may amend; but when he sees that the time given to bewail their sins is employed in multiplying crimes, he then calls the very time to judge them. "He hath called against me the time." — Lamen. i. 15. "The very time," says Gregory, "comes to judge." Thus the very time given, and the very mercies shown, to sinners, shall serve to make God chastise them with greater rigor, and abandon them sooner. "We would have cured Babylon, but she is not healed; let us forsake her." — Jer. li. 9. And how does God abandon sinners? He either sends them a sudden death, and makes them die in sin, or he deprives them of his abundant graces, and leaves them with the sufficient grace, with which they can, but will not, save their souls. The blindness of their understanding, the hardness of their heart, the evil habits which they have contracted, shall render their salvation morally impossible; and thus they shall be, if not absolutely, at least morally abandoned. "I will take away the hedge thereof,

and it shall be wasted." — Is. v. 5. O, what a chastisement! When the master of the vineyard takes away its hedges, and leaves it open to men and to beasts, does he not show that he abandons it? It is thus that God acts when he abandons the soul; he takes away the hedge of holy fear, and of remorse of conscience, and leaves her in darkness. And then all the monsters of crime shall enter the soul. "Thou hast appointed darkness, and it is night; in it shall all the beasts of the wood go about." — Ps. ciii. 20. And the sinner, abandoned in that obscurity, shall despise the grace of God, heaven, admonitions, and excommunications, and will make a jest of his own damnation. "The wicked man, when he is come into the depth of sins, contemneth." — Prov. xviii. 3.

God will not chastise the sinner in this life; but not to be punished in this world shall be the greatest chastisement of the wicked. "Let us have pity on the wicked, but he will not learn justice." — Isa. xxvi. 10. On this passage St. Bernard says, This mercy I do not wish for; it is above all wrath. "Misericordiam hanc nolo: super omnem iram misericordia ista." — Serm. xlii. in Cant. O, what a chastisement is it when God abandons the sinner into the hands of his sins, and appears not to demand any further account of them! "According to the multitude of his wrath he will not seek *him*." — Ps. ix. 4. God appears not to be enraged against sinners. "My jealousy shall depart from you, and I will cease and be angry no more." — Ez. xvi. 42. He appears to allow them all that they desire in this life. "I let them go according to the desires of their heart." — Ps. lxxx. 13. Miserable the sinner that prospers in this life! His prosperity is a sign that God waits to make him a

victim of his justice for eternity. "Why," said Jeremias, "doth the way of the wicked prosper?" — Jer. xii. 1. He answers, "Gather them together as sheep for a sacrifice." — Ibid. ver. 3. There is no punishment greater than that which God inflicts, when he permits a sinner to add sin to sin. "Add thou iniquity upon their iniquity . . . . let them be blotted out of the book of the living." — Ps. lxviii. 28. In explaining these words, Bellarmine says that "there is no punishment greater than when sin is the punishment of sin." It would be a smaller punishment to be struck dead by the Lord after their first sin; for, by dying afterwards, they shall suffer as many hells as they have committed sins.

Affections and Prayers.

My God, I know that in my miserable state I have deserved to be deprived of thy grace and light; but seeing the light which thou now givest me, and feeling that thou now callest me to repentance, I have just reason to hope that thou hast not as yet abandoned me. And since, O Lord, thou hast not abandoned me, multiply thy mercies on my soul, increase thy light, increase my desire to serve and love thee. Change me, O omnipotent God, and, from being a traitor and rebel, make me a great lover of thy goodness, that I may one day enter heaven to praise thy mercies for all eternity. Thou then wishest to pardon me, and I desire nothing but the pardon of my sins and the gift of thy love. I am sorry, O infinite Goodness, for having so often offended thee. I love thee, O Sovereign Good, because thou dost command me to love thee; I love thee, because thou well deservest my love. Ah, my Redeemer, through the merits of thy blood, give thy love to a sinner whom thou hast

loved so ardently, and whom thou hast borne with so patiently for so many years; I hope for every grace from thy mercy. I hope to love thee always till death, and for eternity. "The mercies of the Lord I will sing forever." I will praise thy mercy, O my Jesus. I will forever praise thy mercy, O Mary, who hast obtained for me so many graces; I acknowledge that I have received them all through thy intercession. Continue, O my mother, to assist me by thy prayers, and to obtain for me holy perseverance.

THIRD POINT.

It is related in the Life of Father Louis La Nusa, that in Palermo there were two friends who went one day to take a walk. One of them, called Cæsar, who was a comedian, seeing the other oppressed with melancholy, said, "How long is it since you were at confession? Is it on account of your long absence from the sacraments that you are so much troubled? Listen to me: Father La Nusa told me one day that God gave me twelve years to live, and that if, within that period, I did not amend, I should die an unhappy death. I have since travelled through so many parts of the world; I have had many attacks of sickness, one of which brought me to the brink of death; but in this month the twelve years shall be completed, and I now feel better than in any part of my past life." He then invited his friend to hear, on Saturday, a new comedy which he had composed. But what happened? On Saturday, the 24th of November, 1688, as he was going on the stage, he was seized with apoplexy, and died suddenly. He expired in the arms of a female comedian, and thus the comedy ended. But let us make the application to

ourselves. Brother, when the devil tempts you again to sin, if you wish to be lost, you have it in your power to commit sin; but do not then say that you wish to be saved. As long as you wish to sin, regard yourself as damned, and imagine that God writes the sentence of your damnation, and that he says to you. "What is there that I ought to do more for my vineyard, that I have not done to it?" — Isa. v. 4. Ungrateful soul, what more ought I to do for you, that I have not done? But, since you wish to be lost, go into eternal fire; the fault is your own.

But you will say, "Where, then, is the mercy of God?" - Ah, unhappy soul! do you not feel that God has shown you mercy in bearing with you for so many years, after so many sins? You should remain forever prostrate on the earth, thanking him for his mercy, and saying, "The mercies of the Lord, that we are not consumed." — Lam. iii. 22. By committing a single mortal sin, you have been guilty of a greater crime, than if you had trampled under your feet the first monarch in the world. You have been guilty of so many mortal sins, that if you had committed against your brother the injuries which you have offered to God, he would not have borne with you. God has not only waited for you, but he has so often called you and invited you to pardon. If God had stood in need of you, or if you had conferred a great favor upon him, could he show you greater mercy? If, then, you offend him again, you shall change his mercy into wrath and vengeance.

If, after the master had given it another year to produce fruit, the fruitless fig-tree still remained barren, who could expect that the Lord would have allowed it more time, or would not have cut it

down? Listen, then, to the admonition of St. Augustine: "O fruitless tree! the axe is deferred; be not secure; you shall be cut off." Your punishment, says the saint, has been delayed, but not taken away; if you abuse any longer the divine mercy, *you shall be cut off;* in the end vengeance shall fall upon you. What do you wait for? Will you wait till God sends you to hell? But should he send you there, you already know that your ruin is irreparable. The Lord is silent, but he is not silent forever; when the time of vengeance arrives, he no longer holds his peace. "These things hast thou done, and I was silent. Thou thoughtest unjustly that I should be like to thee. I will reprove thee and set before thy face." — Ps. xlix. 21. I will place before your eyes the mercies I have shown you, and will make these very mercies judge and condemn you.

Affections and Prayers.

Ah, my God! unhappy me, should I henceforth be unfaithful to thee, and betray thee again after the light thou now givest me. This light is a sign thou wishest to pardon me. I repent, O Sovereign Good, of all the injuries I have done thee, because they have offended thee, who art infinite goodness. In thy blood I hope for pardon, and I hope for it with certainty; but should I again turn my back upon thee, I would deserve a hell created on purpose for myself. And what makes me tremble, O God of my soul, is, that I may again lose thy grace. I have so often promised to be faithful to thee, and have afterwards rebelled against thee. Ah, Lord, do not permit it; do not ever abandon me to the great misfortune of seeing myself again thy enemy. Send me any chastisement, but not this. *Do not*

permit me to be separated from thee. Shouldst thou see that I will again offend thee, strike me dead, rather than permit so great an evil. I am content to suffer the most cruel death, sooner than have to weep over the misery of being again deprived of thy grace. *Do not permit me to be separated from thee.* I repeat this prayer, O my God; grant that I may repeat it always. *Do not permit me to be separated from thee.* I love thee, my dear Redeemer. I do not wish to be separated from thee. Through the merits of thy death, give me an ardent love, which will bind me so closely to thee, that I may never more be able to dissolve the union. O Mary, my mother, I fear that, if I again offend God, thou too wilt abandon me. Assist me, then, by thy prayers; obtain for me holy perseverance and the love of Jesus Christ.

EIGHTEENTH CONSIDERATION.

ON THE NUMBER OF SINS.

"Because sentence is not speedily pronounced against the evil, the children of men commit evil without fear."—Eccl. viii. 11.

FIRST POINT.

If God instantly chastised the man who insults him, we certainly should not see him so much outraged as we do at present. But because the Lord does not instantly punish sinners, but waits for them, they are encouraged to offend him the more. It is necessary to understand that, though God waits and bears, he does not wait and bear forever

It is the opinion of many holy fathers — of St. Basil, St. Jerome, St. Ambrose, St. Cyril of Alexandria, St. John Chrysostom, St. Augustine, and others — that as God (according to the words of Scripture, Wis. xi. 21 — "Thou hast ordered all things in measure, and number, and weight") has fixed for each the number of his days, the degrees of health and talent which he will give to him, so he has also determined the number of sins which he will pardon; and when this number is completed, he will pardon no more. "Illud sentire nos convenit," says St. Augustine, "tamdiu unumquemque a Dei patientia sustineri, quo consummato, nullam illi veniam reservari." — De Vita Christi, cap. ix. Eusebius of Cæsarea says the same — "Deus expectat usque ad certum numerum, et postea deserit." — Lib. viii. cap. ii. The same doctrine is taught by the above-mentioned fathers.

And these fathers have not spoken at random, but resting on the sacred Scriptures. In one place the Lord says that he restrained his vengeance against the Amorrhites, because the number of their sins was not as yet filled up — "For as yet the iniquities of the Amorrhites are not at the full." — Gen. xv. 16. In another place he says, "I will not add any more to have mercy on the house of Israel." — Osee i. 6. Again he says, "All the men who have tempted me ten times . . . . shall not see the land." — Num. xiv. 22, 23. "Thou hast," says Job, "sealed up my offences as it were in a bag." — Job xiv. 17. Sinners keep no account of their sins; but God keeps an account of them, that when the harvest is ripe, — that is, when the number of sins is completed, — he may take vengeance on them. "Put ye in the sickles; for the harvest is ripe." — Joel iii. 13. In another place he says, "Be not

without fear about sin forgiven, and add not sin to sin." — Eccl. v. 5. As if he said, O sinner! you must tremble even on account of the sins which I have forgiven you; for if you add another, it may happen that this new sin, along with those which have been pardoned, may complete the number, and then there shall be no more mercy for you. "The Lord waiteth patiently, that, when the day of judgment shall come, he may punish them in the fulness of their sins." — 2 Mach. vi. 14. God waits till the measure of iniquities is filled up, and then he chastises the sinner.

Of such chastisements there are many examples in the Scriptures. Saul disobeyed God a second time, and was abandoned. When he entreated Samuel to intercede for him, saying, "Bear, I beseech thee, my sin, and return with me that I may adore the Lord," (1 Kings xv. 25,) Samuel answered, "I will not return with thee, because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, and the Lord hath rejected thee." — ver. 26. We have also the example of Balthassar, who, after having profaned the vessels of the temple at table, saw a hand writing on the wall, "Mane, Thecel, Phares." Daniel came, and in explaining these words, among other things, said, "Thou art weighed in the balance, and art found wanting." — Dan. v. 27. By these words he gave the king to understand that in the balance of divine justice the weight of his sins had made the scale descend. "The same night Balthassar, the Chaldean king, was killed." O, how many miserable sinners meet with a similar fate! They live many years multiplying sins; but, when the number is filled up, they are struck dead, and cast into hell! "They spend their days in wealth, and in a moment they go down to hell"

— Job xxi. 13. There are some who spend their time in investigating the number of the stars, the number of the angels, or the number of years which each shall live. But who can discover the number of sins which God will pardon each individual? We should, therefore, tremble. My brother, it may be that God will pardon you no more after the first criminal pleasure which you indulge, after the first thought to which you consent, or after the first sin which you commit.

Affections and Prayers.

Ah! my God, I thank thee. How many, for fewer sins than I have committed, are now in hell! For them there is no pardon — no hope. And I am still living; I am not in hell; but, if I wish, I can hope for pardon and for paradise. I am sorry above all things for all my sins, because by them I have offended thee, who art infinite goodness. Eternal Father, *look on the face of thy Christ;* behold thy Son dead on the cross for my sake; and through his merits have mercy on me. I wish to die rather than offend thee any more. When I consider the sins I have committed, and the graces thou hast bestowed on me, I have just reason to fear that, if I commit another sin, the measure shall be completed, and that I shall be damned. Ah! assist me by thy grace; from thee I hope for light and strength to be faithful to thee. And if thou seest that I should again offend thee, take me out of my life, now that I hope to be in a state of grace. My God, I love thee above all things, and I feel a greater fear of incurring thy enmity than of death. For thy mercy's sake do not permit me ever more to become thy enemy. Mary, my mother, have pity on me; assist me; obtain for me holy perseverance.

SECOND POINT.

Some sinners say, "But God is merciful." "Who," I ask, "denies it?" The mercy of God is infinite; but though his mercy is infinite, how many are cast into hell every day! "The Lord hath sent me to heal the contrite of heart." — Is. lxi. 1. God heals those who have a good will. He pardons sins, but he cannot pardon the determination to commit sin. These sinners will also say, "I am young." You are young; but God counts not years, but sins. The number of sins which God pardons is not the same for all; some he pardons a hundred; others a thousand sins; others he sends to hell after the second sin. How many has the Lord condemned to eternal misery after the first sin! St. Gregory relates that a child of five years, for uttering a blasphemy, was condemned to hell. The most holy Virgin revealed to that great servant of God, Benedicta of Florence, that a girl twelve years old was damned after her first sin. A boy of eight years died after his first sin, and was lost. In the Gospel of St. Matthew we find that the Lord instantly cursed the fig-tree the first time he saw it without fruit. "May no fruit grow on thee forever. And immediately the fig-tree withered away." — Matt. xxi. 19. Another time God said, "For three crimes of Damascus, and for four, I will not convert it." — Amos i. 3. Perhaps some daring sinner may have the temerity to demand an account of God why he pardons some three sins, but not four. In this we must adore the judgments of God, and say with the apostle, "O depth of the riches, of the wisdom, and of the knowledge of God! How incomprehensible are his judgments, and unsearchable his ways!" — Rom. xi. 33. The Lord, says

St. Augustine, knows whom he spares, and whom he does not spare. To those who receive mercy he gives it gratuitously; from those who do not receive mercy, it is justly withheld. "Novit ille cui parcat, et cui non parcat. Quibus datur misericordia, gratis datur: quibus non datur, ex justitia non datur." — Lib. de Corrept. c. v.

The obstinate sinner may say, But I have so often offended God, and he has pardoned me; I also hope he will pardon me the sin which I intend to commit. But, I ask, must God spare you forever, because he has not hitherto chastised you? The measure shall be filled up, and vengeance shall come. Samson continued to allow himself to be deluded by Dalila, hoping that, as on former occasions, he would escape from the Philistines. "I will go out, as I did before, and shake myself." — Judges xvi. 20. But at last he was taken, and lost his life. "Say not, I have sinned, and what harm hath befallen me?" — Eccl. v. 4. Say not, says the Lord, I have committed so many sins, and God has not chastised me; "for the Most High is a patient rewarder;" (Ibid.;) — that is, he will one day come and punish all; and the greater the mercy which he will have shown, the more severe shall be the chastisement which he will inflict. St. Chrysostom says, that God should be dreaded more when he bears with the obstinate sinner, than when he punishes him suddenly. "Plus timendum cum tolerat, quam cum festinanter punit." Because, according to St. Gregory, if they remain ungrateful, God punishes with the greatest rigor those whom he waits for with the greatest patience. "Quos diutius expectat, durius damnat." And it often happens, adds the saint, that they whom God has borne with for a long time, die unexpectedly, and

without time for repentance. "Sæpe qui diu tolerati sunt subita morte rapiuntur, ut nec flere ante mortem liceat." And the greater the light which God will have given, the greater shall be your blindness and obstinacy in sin. "For it had been better for them not to have known the way of justice, than, after they have known it, to turn back." — 2 Pet. ii. 21. And St. Paul says, that it is morally impossible for a soul that sins after being enlightened, to be again converted. "For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, have tasted the heavenly gifts, ... and are fallen away, to be renewed to penance." — Heb. vi. 4, 6.

The threats of the Lord against those who are deaf to his calls, are truly alarming. "Because I have called, and you have refused, ... I also will laugh in your destruction, and will mock when that shall come to you which you feared." — Prov. i. 24. Mark the words — *I also:* they mean that, as the sinner has mocked God by his confessions, by promising fidelity, and afterwards betraying him, so the Lord will mock him at the hour of death. The wise man says, "As a dog that returned to the vomit, so is the fool that repeateth his folly." — Prov. xxvi. 11. In explaining this text, Denis the Carthusian says, that as a dog that eats what he has just vomited, is an object of disgust and abomination, so the sinner who relapses into sins which he has detested in the tribunal of penance, renders himself hateful in the sight of God. "Sicut id quod per vomitum est rejectum resumere est valde abominabile et turpe, sic peccata deleta reiterare."

Affections and Prayers.

Behold me, O my God, at thy feet. I am that disgusting dog that has so often eaten the forbidden

apples, which I before detested. I do not deserve mercy; but, O my Redeemer, the blood which thou hast shed for me encourages and obliges me to hope for it. How often have I offended thee, and thou hast pardoned me! I promised never more to offend thee, and I have afterwards returned to the vomit; and thou hast again pardoned me! What do I wait for? Is it that thou mayst send me to hell, or that thou mayst abandon me into the hand of my sins, which would be a greater punishment than hell? No, my God, I wish to amend; and in order to be faithful to thee, I will put all my confidence in thee. I will, whenever I shall be tempted, always and instantly have recourse to thee. Hitherto, I have trusted in my promises and resolutions, and have neglected to recommend myself to thee in my temptations; this has been the cause of my ruin. Henceforth thou shalt be my hope and my strength, and thus I shall be able to do all things. "I can do all things in him that strengtheneth me." — Philip. iv. 13. Give me grace, then, O my Jesus, through thy merits, to recommend myself to thee, and to ask thy aid in my wants. I love thee, O Sovereign Good, amiable above every good; I wish to love thee alone; but it is from thee I must receive aid to love thee. O Mary, my mother, do thou also assist me by thy intercession; keep me under thy protection, and make me always invoke thee when I shall be tempted. Thy name shall be my defence.

THIRD POINT.

"My son, hast thou sinned? do so no more; but, for thy former sins, pray that they may be forgiven thee." — Eccl. xxi. 1. Behold, dear Christian, the advice which your good Lord gives you because he

desires your salvation. Son, offend me no more; but from this day forward be careful to ask pardon for your past transgressions. My brother, the more you have offended God, the more you should tremble at the thought of offending him again; for the next sin which you commit shall make the balance of divine justice descend, and you shall be lost. I do not say absolutely that after another sin there shall be no more forgiveness for you; for this I do not know; but I say that it may happen. Hence, when you shall be tempted, say within yourself, "Perhaps God will pardon me no more, and I shall be lost!" Tell me; were it probable that certain food contained poison, would you eat it? If you had reason to think that on a certain road your enemies lay in wait to take away your life, would you pass that way as long as you could find another more free from danger? And what security, or even what probability, have you that, if you relapse into sin, you shall afterwards repent sincerely of it, and that you will not return again to the vomit? What just reason have you to believe that God will not strike you dead in the very act of sin, or that, after your sin, he will not abandon you?

O God! If you purchase a house, you spare no pains to get all the securities necessary to guard against the loss of your money; if you take medicine, you are careful to assure yourself that it cannot injure you; if you pass over a torrent, you cautiously avoid all danger of falling into it; and for a miserable gratification, for a beastly pleasure, you will risk your eternal salvation, saying, "I expect to go to confession after this sin." But when, I ask, will you go to confession? "Perhaps on Sunday." And who has promised that you will live till Sunday? Perhaps you intend to go to confes-

sion to-morrow. But who promises you to-morrow. "Diem tenes," says St. Augustine, "qui horam non tenes?" How can you promise yourself that you shall go to confession to-morrow, when you know not whether you shall be among the living in another hour? "He," continues the saint, "who has promised pardon to penitents, has not promised to-morrow to sinners; perhaps he will give it, and perhaps he will not." If you now commit sin, God, perhaps, will give you time for repentance, and perhaps he will not; and should he not give it, what shall become of you for all eternity? In the mean time, by consenting to sin, you lose your soul for the sake of a miserable pleasure, and expose yourself to the risk of being lost forever. Would you, for that vile gratification, risk a sum of one thousand ducats? Would you, for that momentary pleasure, expose to danger your all — your money, your houses, your possessions, your liberty and life? Surely you would not. Will you, then, for that wretched delight, lose all — your soul, heaven, and God? Do you believe that heaven, hell, and eternity, are truths of faith, or that they are fables? Do you believe that, if death overtake you in sin, you shall be lost forever? O, what temerity! what folly! to condemn yourself, by your own free act, to an eternity of torments, with the hope of afterwards reversing the sentence of your condemnation. "Nemo," says St. Augustine, "sub spe salutis vult ægrotare." No one is so foolish as to take poison with the hope of being preserved from death; and will you condemn yourself to eternal death, saying, I will, perhaps, be hereafter delivered from it? O folly, which has brought, and brings, so many souls to hell! "Thou hast," says the Lord, "trusted in thy wickedness.

. . . . Evil shall come upon thee, and thou shalt not know the rising thereof." — Isa. xlvii. 10, 11. You have sinned through a rash confidence in the divine mercy; vengeance shall unexpectedly fall upon you, and you shall not know whence it comes.

Affections and Prayers.

Behold, O Lord, one of those fools who have so often lost their souls and thy grace with the hope of afterwards recovering them. And hadst thou struck me dead in those nights in which I was in sin, what would have become of me? I thank thee for thy mercy, which has waited for me, and which now makes me sensible of my folly. I see that thou desirest my salvation; and I too wish to save my soul. I am sorry, O infinite Goodness, for having so often turned my back upon thee. I love thee with my whole heart. And I hope in the merits of thy passion, O my Jesus, that I will never again be one of those fools. Pardon me at this moment, and give me the gift of thy grace. I will never leave thee again. "In thee, O Lord, have I hoped; let me never be confounded." Ah no; I hope, O my Redeemer, never more to suffer the misfortune and confusion of seeing myself deprived of thy grace and love. Grant me holy perseverance, and give me the grace always to ask it of thee by invoking thy holy name and the name of thy mother, and by saying, "Jesus, assist me; most holy Mary, pray for me." Yes, my queen, if I have recourse to thee, I shall never be conquered. And when the temptation continues, obtain for me the grace not to cease to invoke thy aid.

NINETEENTH CONSIDERATION.

ON THE GREAT ADVANTAGES OF THE GRACE OF GOD, AND THE GREAT EVIL OF BEING IN ENMITY WITH GOD.

"Man knoweth not the price thereof."—Job xxviii. 13.

FIRST POINT.

"If," says the Lord, "you separate the precious from the vile, thou shalt be as my mouth."—Jer. xv. 19. They who know how to distinguish what is precious from what is vile, are like God, "who knows how to refuse the evil and to choose the good." Let us examine how great a good it is to be in the grace of God, and how great an evil to be in enmity with God. Men do not understand the value of divine grace. "Man knoweth not the price thereof." Hence they exchange it for vanity, for a little earth, or for a beastly pleasure; but it is an infinite treasure, which makes us worthy of the friendship of God. "For," says the wise man, "she is an infinite treasure to men, which they that use, become the friends of God."—Wis. vii. 14. Hence, a soul in grace is the friend of God. The Gentiles, who were deprived of the light of faith, considered it impossible for a creature to attain to the friendship of God; and they who were guided only by the light of nature could scarcely think otherwise; for, as St. Jerome says, friendship makes friends equal: Amicitia pares aut accipit, aut facit. But God has declared in several places in the holy Scriptures, that by means of this grace we become his friends if we observe his law. "You are my

friends if you do the things which I command. I will not now call you servants, ... but I have called you friends." — John xv. 14. Hence St. Gregory exclaims, O goodness of God! We do not deserve to be called even servants, and he condescends to call us friends. "O nimia divinæ bonitatis dignatio! Servi non sumus digni nominari, et amici vocamur."

How fortunate would the man esteem himself, who should have the king for his friend! In a vassal it would be temerity to presume to seek the friendship of his sovereign; but it is not temerity in a soul to aspire to the friendship of her God. St. Augustine relates that two courtiers entered into a monastery of hermits, and that one of them began to read the Life of St. Antony the Abbot. "He read, and in reading his heart became gradually divested of worldly affections." Turning to his companion, he said, "What do we seek? We can hope for nothing more than the friendship of the emperor. And through how many perils do we reach this greater danger? And how long shall this last?" Friend, fools that we are, what do we seek? The most we can expect to gain in the service of the emperor is, to become his friends; and should we succeed in gaining his friendship, we shall expose our eternal salvation to greater risk. It is with difficulty we can ever become the friends of Cæsar; "but, if I wish, I am this moment the friend of God."

Whosoever, then, is in the state of grace is the friend of God. He also becomes the son of God; "You are gods, and the sons of the Most High."— Ps. lxxxi. 6. Thus is the great gift which we have received from the divine love through Jesus Christ. "Behold," says St. John, "what manner of charity

the Father hath bestowed upon us — that we should be called, and should be, the sons of God." — 1 John iii. 1. Moreover, the soul in the state of grace is the spouse of God. "I will espouse thee to me in faith." — Osee ii. 20. Hence the father of the prodigal, when his son returned, ordered a ring to be put on his finger, in token of his espousal. Lastly, the soul becomes the temple of the Holy Ghost. Sister Mary d'Ognes saw a devil go out from an infant who received baptism, and the Holy Ghost enter with a crowd of angels.

Affections and Prayers.

Then, my God, when my soul had the happiness of being in thy grace, it was thy friend, thy child, thy spouse, and thy temple; but, by committing sin, it lost all, and became thy enemy and the slave of hell. But I thank thee, O my God, for giving me time to recover thy grace. I am sorry above all things for having offended thee, O infinite Goodness, and I love thee above all things. Ah! receive me again into thy friendship. For thy mercy's sake do not reject me. I know that I deserve to be banished from thy face; but, by the sacrifice which he offered on Calvary, Jesus Christ has merited for me mercy and pardon. *Thy kingdom come.* My Father, (it is thus thy Son has taught me to call thee,) — my Father, come with thy grace to reign in my heart; grant that I may serve thee alone, that I may live for thee alone, and that I may love thee alone. *And lead us not into temptation.* Ah! do not permit my enemies to tempt me, so that I may be conquered. *But deliver us from evil.* Deliver me from hell; but deliver me first from sin, which alone can lead me to hell. O Mary, pray for me, and preserve me from

the great misfortune of ever seeing myself in sin and deprived of the grace of thine and my God.

SECOND POINT.

St. Thomas of Aquino says that the gift of grace surpasses every gift which a creature can receive, since it is a participation of the divine nature. "Donum gratiæ excedit omnem facultatem naturæ creatæ, cum sit participatio divinæ naturæ." And before him, St. Peter said the same, — "that by these you may be made partakers of the divine nature." — 2 Pet. i. 4. Such the grace which Jesus Christ has merited for us by his passion; he has communicated to us the same splendor which he received from the Father. "And the glory which thou hast given to me, I have given to them." — John xvii. 22. In fine, a soul in the state of grace, is one thing with God. "He," says St. Paul, "that is joined to the Lord, is one spirit." — I Cor. vi. 17. The Redeemer has said that in a soul that loves God, the three Persons of the Most Holy Trinity dwell. "If any one love me, my Father will love him, and we will come to him, and we will make our abode with him." — John xiv. 23.

So great is the beauty of a soul in the state of grace, that God himself extols it. "How beautiful art thou! how beautiful art thou!" — Cant. iv. 1. The Lord appears never to take his eyes off the soul that loves him, nor to close his ears to her petitions. "The eyes of the Lord are upon the just; and his ears unto their prayers." — Ps. xxxiii. 16. St. Bridget used to say that a man could not behold the beauty of a soul in the grace of God, without dying through joy. And St. Catharine of

Sienna, seeing a soul in a state of grace, said that she would willingly have given her life to prevent that soul from losing such beauty. Hence she kissed the ground on which the priests walked, because through them souls recover the grace of God.

How many treasures of merits can a soul in the state of grace acquire? In each moment she can merit an eternity of glory. St. Thomas teaches that every act of love merits for the soul eternal life. "Quilibet actus charitatis meretur vitam æternam." Why, then, should we envy the nobles of the earth? If we are in the grace of God, we can constantly acquire grandeurs in heaven, which far surpass all their earthly greatness. A certain lay brother of the Society of Jesus, as Father Patrignani relates in his Menologies, appeared after death, and said that he and Philip the Second, king of Spain, were in the enjoyment of glory; but that his glory in heaven was as far superior to that of Philip, as that monarch was raised above him on this earth. Moreover, he alone who has experienced it, can conceive the peace which a soul in the grace of God enjoys in this life. "O taste and see that the Lord is sweet." — Ps. xxxiii. 9. The words of the Lord cannot fail. "Much peace have they that love thy law." — Ps. cxviii. 165. The peace of a soul which is united with God, surpasses all the pleasures which the senses and the world can give. "The peace of God, which surpasseth all understanding." — Phil. iv. 7.

Affections and Prayers.

O my good Jesus, thou art the good pastor who didst allow thyself to be slaughtered in order to give life to thy sheep. When I fled away from thee,

thou didst not cease to follow and seek after me; thou dost receive me now that I seek thee, and cast myself with a penitent heart at thy feet. Give me again thy grace, which I have miserably lost through my own fault. I am sorry for it with my whole heart; I would wish to die of sorrow at the thought of having so often turned my back on thee. Pardon me through the merits of the painful death which thou hast suffered for me on the cross. Bind me with the sweet chains of thy love, and do not permit me ever more to fly away from thee. Since I have merited the eternal torments of hell, give me strength to bear with patience all the crosses which thou sendest me. Since I have deserved to be for eternity under the feet of the devils, make me embrace with love all the contempt and insults which I shall receive from men. Finally, make me obedient to all thy holy inspirations, and give me grace to conquer all human respects for the love of thee. I am resolved henceforward to serve thee only; let others say what they please, I will serve thee alone, O my most amiable God; thee only do I wish to please. But give me thy aid, without which I can do nothing. I love thee, O my Jesus, with my whole heart, and I trust in thy blood. Mary, my hope, assist me by thy prayers. I glory in being thy servant, and thou dost glory in saving sinners who have recourse to thee. Come to my relief and save me.

THIRD POINT.

Let us now see the misery of a soul that is in enmity with God. She is separated from God, her Sovereign Good. "Your iniquities," says the prophet Isaias, "have divided between you and your God." —Isa. lix. 2. Hence she is no longer his, and he is no longer her God. "You are not my people,

and I will not be yours." — Osee i. 9. The soul not only belongs no longer to God, but God even hates her, and condemns her to hell. God does not hate any of his creatures; he does not hate the wild beast, the viper, or the toad. "Thou lovest all things that are, and hatest none of the things which thou hast made." — Wis. xi. 25. But he cannot refrain from hating sinners. "Thou hatest all the workers of iniquity." — Ps. v. 7. Yes; God cannot but hate sin, which is diametrically opposed to his will; and in hating sin, he must necessarily hate the sinner who is united to his sin. "But to God the wicked and his wickedness are hateful alike." — Wis. xiv. 9.

O God! if a man has for his enemy a monarch of the earth, he cannot sleep; he is every moment in dread of death. And how can he who is the enemy of God, enjoy peace? He may escape the vengeance of his sovereign by concealing himself in a wood, or by taking refuge in a distant country. But who can fly from the hands of God? Lord, says David, if I shall ascend into heaven, if I shall hide myself in hell, wheresoever I go, your hand can reach me. "If I ascend into heaven, thou art there; if I descend into hell, thou art present.... Even there also shall thy hand lead me." — Ps. cxxxviii. 8, 10.

Poor sinners! they are cursed by God, cursed by the angels, cursed by the saints, cursed also every day on earth by all priests and religious, who, in reciting the divine office, proclaim them accursed. "*They are cursed who decline from thy commandments.*" — Ps. cxviii. 21. Moreover, the soul that is in enmity with God has lost all her merits. Should a man be equal in merits to St. Paul the Hermit, who lived forty-eight years in a cave; to St. Francis Xavier, who gained ten millions of souls to God; or

to St. Paul the Apostle, who, according to St. Jerome, surpassed in merits all the other apostles, — that man, if he commit a single mortal sin, loses all. "All his justices which he hath done, shall not be remembered." — Ezek. xviii. 24. Behold the ruin which the enmity of God produces; it transforms the child of God into the slave of Lucifer; his beloved friend into an enemy whom he sovereignly hates; and the heir of heaven into one condemned to hell. St. Francis de Sales used to say that, were the angels capable of weeping, they should shed tears of pity at the sight of a soul that commits mortal sin and loses the divine grace.

But the greatest misery is, that the angels would, if it were in their power, weep, and the sinner weeps not. A Christian, says St. Augustine, if he lose a sheep or any other valuable animal, weeps over the loss, and neither eats nor sleeps; but when he loses the grace of God, he eats and sleeps, and sheds not a single tear.

Affections and Prayers.

Behold, O my Redeemer, the miserable state to which I have brought myself. To make me worthy of thy grace, thou hast spent thirty-three years in toils and pains; and I, for the poisoned pleasure of a moment, have despised and lost it. I thank thy mercy, which still gives me time to recover it if I wish. Yes, I wish to do every thing in my power to regain it. Tell me what I must do in order to obtain thy pardon. Dost thou wish me to repent? O my Jesus, I am sorry with my whole heart for having offended thy infinite goodness. Dost thou wish me to love thee? I love thee above all things. Hitherto I have unfortunately employed my heart in loving creatures and vanities. From this day

forward I will live only for thee; I will love only thee, my God, my treasure, my hope, my strength. "I will love thee, O Lord, my strength." — Ps. xvii. 1. Thy merits, thy wounds, O my Jesus, shall be my hope and my strength; from thee I hope for strength to be faithful to thee. Give me, then, O my Redeemer, the gift of thy grace, and do not permit me ever again to depart from thee. Divest my soul of all worldly affections, and inflame my heart with thy holy love. "Kindle in it the fire of thy love." Mary, my mother, who wert always on fire with divine love, make me burn like thee with the love of God.

TWENTIETH CONSIDERATION.

FOLLY OF SINNERS.

"For the wisdom of the world is foolishness with God."— 1 Cor. iii. 19.

FIRST POINT.

The Venerable John D'Avila would have divided the world into two prisons, one for the incredulous, the other for Christians who live in sin at a distance from God. The prison of the latter he would have called the prison of fools. But the greatest misery and misfortune is, that these miserable men esteem themselves wise and prudent, though they are the most foolish and imprudent of mortals. And unfortunately they are exceedingly numerous. "The number of fools is infinite."— Eccl. i. 15. Some are foolish through love of honors; some for the sake of pleasures; and others from attachment to the miserable goods of this earth.

And great as their folly is, they have the temerity to call the saints fools, because they despise the goods of this life in order to gain eternal salvation and the possession of God, who is the true and supreme good They deem it folly to embrace contempt, and to pardon injuries, folly to abstain from sensual pleasures, and practise mortification; folly to renounce honors and riches, to love solitude and an humble and hidden life. But they never reflect that the Lord has called their wisdom folly. "For," says the apostle, "the wisdom of the world is foolishness with God." — 1 Cor. iii. 19.

Ah! they shall one day confess their folly; but when? When there shall be no remedy for it. They shall then say in despair, "We fools esteemed their life madness, and their end without honor." — Wis. v. 4. Ah! fools that we have been! we regarded the lives of the saints as folly; but now we know that we have been miserably foolish. "Behold how they are numbered among the children of God, and their lot is among the saints." — Ibid. ver. 5. Behold how they have obtained a place among the happy number of the children of God, and have secured their lot among the saints — an eternal lot, which shall make them happy for eternity; and we are among the number of the slaves of the devil, condemned to burn in this pit of torments for all eternity. "*Therefore we have erred*" — thus they shall conclude their lamentation — "*from the way of truth, and the light of justice hath not shined unto us.*" — Wis. v. 6. Then we have erred by shutting our eyes to God's light; and what renders our condition still more forlorn is, that for our error there is no remedy, and there shall be none as long as God shall be God.

How great, then, the folly of sinners, who, for a vile emolument, for a little smoke, for a transient

delight lose the grace of God! What would not a vassal do in order to gain the favor of his sovereign! O God! for a miserable gratification, to lose God, the supreme good! to lose paradise! to forfeit peace in this life, by bringing into the soul the monster sin, which, by its remorses, shall torture her unceasingly! and to condemn yourself voluntarily to everlasting woe! Would you indulge in that forbidden pleasure, if, in punishment, your hand was to be burnt? or if you were to be shut up for a year in a grave? Would you commit that sin, if, after consenting to it, you should forfeit a hundred crowns? And still you believe and know that, in yielding to sin, you lose heaven and God, and that you are condemned to eternal fire; and after all you transgress the divine law.

Affections and Prayers

O God of my soul, what should be my lot at this moment, if thou hadst not shown me so many mercies? I should be in hell, among the number of the foolish, to which I have belonged. I thank thee, O my Lord, and I entreat thee not to abandon me in my blindness. I feel that thou tenderly callest and invitest me to ask pardon, and to hope for great graces from thee, after the great insults I have offered to thee. Yes, my Savior, I hope thou wilt admit me among thy children; I am not worthy to be called thy child, after having so often insulted thee to thy face. "*Father, I am not worthy to be called thy child: I have sinned against Heaven and before thee.*" But I know that thou goest in search of the strayed sheep, and that thou feelest consolation in embracing thy lost children. My dear Father, I am sorry for having offended thee. I cast myself at thy feet, and embrace them; I will not depart till thou pardon and bless me.

"I will not let thee go except thou bless me." — Gen. xxxii. 26. Bless me, O my Father, and let the fruit of thy benediction be, a great sorrow for my sins, and a great love for thee. I love thee, O my Father; I love thee with my whole heart. Do not permit me ever more to depart from thee. Deprive me of all, but do not strip me of thy love. O Mary, if God is my Father, thou art my mother. Do thou also bless me. I do not deserve to be thy son; accept me for thy servant; but make me a servant who will always love thee tenderly, and always confide in thy protection.

SECOND POINT.

Poor sinners! they labor and toil for the attainment of worldly sciences, or the art of gaining the goods of this life, which shall soon end, and neglect the goods of the next life, which is everlasting! They lose their reason to such a degree, that they become not only fools, but senseless beasts; for, living like brute animals, they attend not to what is not lawful or unlawful, but only follow the beastly instincts of the senses, and embrace what is pleasing to the flesh, without ever reflecting on what they lose, or on the eternal ruin which they bring upon themselves. To live in this manner is to act not like a man, but like a senseless beast. "Hominem illum dicimus," says St. Chrysostom, "qui imaginem homini salvam retinet. Quæ autem est imago hominis? Rationalem esse." To be a man, is to be rational — that is, to act according to reason, and not according to the sensual appetite. Were beasts to receive from God the use of reason, and to act according to its dictates, we should say that they acted like men; and, on the other hand, when a man follows the impulse of the senses

in opposition to reason, it must be said he acts like a beast.

"O that they would be wise, and would understand, and would provide for their last end." — Deut. xxxii. 29. He who acts according to the rules of prudence, looks to the future — that is, to what must happen at the end of life — to death and judgment, and after judgment, hell or heaven. O, how much wiser is the peasant who saves his soul, than the monarch who brings himself to hell! "Better is a child that is poor and wise, than a king that is old and foolish, who knoweth not to foresee hereafter." — Eccl. iv. 13. O God! would not all pronounce the man to be a fool, who, in order to gain a shilling, should risk his entire property? And shall he not be considered foolish, who, for a momentary gratification, forfeits the grace of God, and exposes his soul to the danger of eternal perdition? The care of present, and the total neglect of eternal goods and evils, is the ruin of the immense multitude of the damned.

God has certainly not placed us in this world to become rich, or acquire honors, or to indulge our senses, but to gain eternal life. "But the end is life everlasting." — Rom. vi. 22. And nothing but the attainment of this end is of importance to us. "One thing is necessary." — Luke x. 42. But there is nothing which sinners despise more than this end; they think only of the present; they each day walk to death, and approach the gate of eternity, but know not whither they are going. "What would you think," says St. Augustine, "of a pilot, who, when asked where he is going, should answer, that he did not know? Would not all exclaim, that he is bringing the ship to ruin? Such," adds the saint, "is the man who runs out of the

way.' Such are the wise of the world, who know how to acquire wealth, to indulge in amusements, to gain posts of honor and emolument, but know not how to save their souls. The rich glutton knew how to lay up wealth; but *he died, and was buried in hell.* Alexander the Great knew how to acquire so many kingdoms; but in a few years he died, and was damned forever. Henry the Eighth knew how to preserve his throne by rebelling against the church; but seeing at death that he lost his soul, he exclaimed, "*We have lost all.*" How many miserable sinners now weep and cry out in hell, "What hath pride profited us? or what advantage hath the boasting of riches brought us? All those things are passed away like a shadow." — Wis. v. 8. Behold, they exclaim, for us all the goods of the world have passed away like a shadow, and nothing remains but eternal wailing and everlasting torments.

"Before man is life and death; that which he shall choose shall be given him." — Eccl. xv. 18. Beloved Christian, God places before you, in this world, life and death; that is, the voluntary privation of forbidden pleasures, by which you will gain eternal life; or the indulgence of them, by which you merit everlasting death. What do you say? What choice do you make? In making the choice, act like a man, and not like a senseless beast. Act like a Christian who believes in the Gospel, and says, "What doth it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and suffer the loss of his own soul?" — Matt. xvi. 26.

Affections and Prayers.

Ah, my God, thou hast given me reason, thou hast given me the light of faith, and I have acted

like a senseless beast, by losing thy grace for the miserable pleasure of the senses, which have passed away like air; and now I find nothing but remorses of conscience, and debts to your divine justice. "Enter not into judgment with thy servant!" Ah, Lord, judge me not according to my merits, but treat me according to thy mercy. Give me light, give me sorrow for the offences which I have committed against thee, and pardon me. "I have gone astray like a sheep that is lost; seek thy servant." I am a lost sheep; and unless you seek after me, I shall be lost forever. Have pity on me for the sake of that blood which thou hast shed for me. I am sorry, O Sovereign Good, for having left thee, and for having voluntarily renounced thy grace. I would wish to die of sorrow; but give me an increase of sorrow. Bring me to heaven, that there I may sing thy mercies. Mary, my mother, thou art my refuge; pray to Jesus for me; beg of him to grant me pardon and holy perseverance.

THIRD POINT.

Let us be persuaded that the truly wise are they who know how to acquire the divine grace and the kingdom of heaven; and let us incessantly implore the Lord to give us the science of the saints, which he gives to all who ask it from him. — Wis. x. 10. O, what a precious science, to know how to love God, and to save our souls! This science consists in knowing how to walk in the way of salvation, and to adopt the means of attaining eternal life. The affair of salvation is of all affairs the most necessary. If we know all things, and know not how to save our souls, our knowledge shall be unprofitable to us, and we shall be forever miserable;

but, on the other hand, though we should be ignorant of all things, we shall be happy for eternity, if we know how to love God. "Blessed is the man," says St. Augustine, "who knows thee, though he be ignorant of other things." One day, brother Egidius said to St. Bonaventure, "Happy you, Father Bonaventure, who are so learned. I am a poor, ignorant man, who knows nothing. You can become more holy than I can." "Listen," replied the saint. "If an ignorant old woman love God more than I do, she shall be more holy than I am." On hearing this, brother Egidius began to exclaim, "O poor old woman, poor old woman, listen, listen: if you love God, you can become more holy than Father Bonaventure."

"Surgunt indocti," says St. Augustine, "et rapiunt cœlum." The unlearned rise up, and bear away the kingdom of heaven. How many rude and illiterate Christians, who, though unable to read, know how to love God, and are saved! And how many of the learned of this world are damned! But the former, not the latter, are truly wise. O, how truly wise were St. Paschal, St. Felix the Capuchin, St. John of God, though unacquainted with human sciences! O, how truly wise were so many holy men, who, abandoning the world, shut themselves up in the cloister, or spent their lives in the desert! How truly wise were St. Benedict, St. Francis of Assisium, and St. Lewis of Toulouse, who renounced the throne! O, how truly wise were so many martyrs, so many tender virgins, who refused the hand of princes, and suffered death for the sake of Jesus Christ! That true wisdom consists in despising the goods of this life, and in securing a happy eternity, even worldlings know and believe; hence, of all persons who give

themselves to God, they say, "Happy they who are truly wise, and save their souls!" In fine, they who renounce the goods of the world to give themselves to God, are said to be undeceived. What, then, should we call those who abandon God for worldly goods? We should call them deluded men. Brother, to what class do you wish to belong? In order to make a good choice, St. Chrysostom tells you to visit the sepulchres of the dead. "Proficiscamur ad sepulchra." The grave is the school in which we may see the vanity of earthly goods, and in which we may learn the science of the saints. Tell me, says St. Chrysostom, are you able there to discover who has been a prince, a noble, or a man of learning? For my part, adds the saint, I see nothing but rottenness, worms, and bones. All is but a dream, a shadow. "Nihil video, nisi putredinem, ossa, et vermes. Omnia fabula, somnium, umbra." Every thing in this world shall soon have an end, and shall vanish like a dream or a shadow. But, dearly beloved Christian, if you wish to be truly wise, it is not enough to know your end; it is necessary to adopt the means of attaining it. All would wish to be saved, and to be saints; but, because they do not employ the means, they never acquire sanctity, and are lost. It is necessary to fly from the occasions of sin, to frequent the sacraments, to practise mental prayer, and, above all, to impress on the heart the following maxims of the Gospel: "What doth it profit a man if he gain the whole world?" —Matt. xvi. 26. "He that loveth his life shall lose it."—John xii. 25. That is, we must even forfeit our life in order to save the soul. "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself." —Matt. xvi. 24. To follow Jesus Christ, it is ne-

cessary to refuse to self-love the pleasures which it seeks. "Life in his *good* will."—Ps. xxix. 6. Our salvation consists in doing the will of God. These, and other similar maxims, should be deeply impressed on the soul.

Affections and Prayers.

O Father of mercies, behold my miseries, and have pity on me; give me light, make me sensible of my past folly, that I may bewail it, and make known to me thy infinite goodness, that I may love it. My Jesus, "*do not deliver up to beasts the souls that confess to thee.*" You have expended your blood for my salvation; do not permit me ever more to be, as I have hitherto been, the slave of the devils. I am sorry, O my Sovereign Good, for having abandoned thee. I curse all the moments in which I voluntarily consented to sin; and I embrace thy holy will, which desires nothing but my welfare. Eternal Father, through the merits of Jesus Christ, give me strength to do all that is pleasing to thee. Strike me dead rather than permit me to oppose thy holy will. Assist me by thy grace to banish from my heart every affection which does not tend to thee. I love thee, O God of my soul, I love thee above all things; and from thee I hope for every good, for pardon, for perseverance in thy love, and for paradise, that there I may love thee for eternity. O Mary, ask these graces for me. Thy Son refuses thee nothing. My hope, I trust in thee.

TWENTY-FIRST CONSIDERATION.

UNHAPPY LIFE OF THE SINNER; AND HAPPY LIFE OF THE CHRISTIAN WHO LOVES GOD.

"There is no peace to the wicked, saith the Lord."—Isa. xlviii. 22. "Much peace have they that love thy law."—Ps. cxviii. 165.

FIRST POINT.

In this life all men seek after peace. The merchant, the soldier, the man who goes to law, labor with the hope of making a fortune, and of thus finding peace, by worldly lucre, by a more exalted post, by gaining a lawsuit. But poor worldlings seek from the world that peace which the world cannot give. God alone can give us peace. The holy church prays in the following words: "Give to thy servants that peace which the world cannot give." No; the world, with all its goods, cannot content the heart of man; for he was created, not for them, but for God alone; hence God alone can make him happy and content. Brute animals, that have been made for sensual delights, find peace in earthly goods: give to an ox a bundle of hay, and to a dog a piece of flesh, and they are content; they desire nothing more. But the soul, which has been created for no other end than to love God, and to live in union with him, shall never be able to find peace or happiness in sensual enjoyments; God alone can make her perfectly content.

The Son of God gave the appellation of fool to the rich man who, after having reaped a rich harvest from his fields, said to himself, "Soul, thou

hast much goods laid up for many years; take thy rest; eat, drink, and make good cheer." — Luke xii. 19. "Stulte," says St. Basil, "numquid animam porcinam habes?" Miserable fool! have you the soul of a swine, of a brute, that you expect to make it happy by eating, drinking, or by sensual delights? "*Requiesce, comede, bibe.*" A man may be puffed up, but he cannot be satisfied by the goods of this world. "Inflari potest," says St. Bernard, "satiari non potest." On the words of the Gospel, "*Behold, we have left all things*," the same St. Bernard writes, that he saw different classes of fools laboring under different species of folly. All had a great thirst for happiness; some were satiated with the goods of this earth, which is a figure of the avaricious; others with wind, the figure of the ambitious, who seek after empty honors; others, seated round a furnace, swallowed the sparks that were thrown from it; these were the passionate and vindictive; others, in fine, drank putrid waters from a fetid lake; and these were the voluptuous and unchaste. Hence, turning to them, the saint exclaims, "O fools, do you not see that these things increase, rather than diminish, your thirst?" "Hæc potius famem provocant quam extinguunt?" The goods of the world are but apparent goods, and therefore they cannot satisfy the heart of man. "You have eaten," says the prophet Aggeus, "but have not had enough." — Agg. i. 6. Hence, the more the avaricious man possesses, the more he seeks to acquire. "Major pecunia," says St. Augustine, "avaritiæ fauces non claudit, sed extendit." The possession of great wealth does not close, but rather extends, the jaws of avarice. The more the unchaste man wallows in the mire of impurity, the greater is his disgust, and, at the

same time, his desire for such beastly pleasures; and how can dung and carnal filthiness content the heart? The same happens to the ambitious man, who wishes to satisfy his desires by smoke; for he always attends more to what he wants than to what he possesses. After having acquired so many kingdoms, Alexander the Great wept, because he had not dominion over other countries. If worldly goods could content the human heart, the rich and the monarchs of the earth should enjoy complete happiness; but experience shows the contrary. Solomon tells us that he refused no indulgence to his senses. "Whatsoever my eyes desired, I refused them not." — Eccl. ii. 10. But after all his sensual enjoyments, what did he say? "Vanity of vanities, and all is vanity." — Ibid. i. 2. That is, every thing in this world is mere vanity, a pure lie, pure folly.

Affections and Prayers.

Ah, my God, what now remains of all the offences I have offered to thee, but pains, bitterness, and merits for hell? I am not sorry for the pain and remorse which I now feel; on the contrary, they console me, because they are the gift of thy grace, and make me hope that, since thou inspirest these sentiments, thou wishest to pardon me. What displeases me is the pain I have given thee, my Redeemer, who hast loved me so tenderly. I deserved, O my Lord, to be abandoned by thee; but, instead of abandoning me, I see that thou dost offer me pardon, and that thou art the first to ask for a reconciliation. O my Jesus, I wish to make peace with thee, and desire thy grace more than every earthly good. I am sorry, O infinite Goodness, for having offended thee; I would wish to die of sor-

row for my offences. Ah! through the love which thou didst entertain for me when thou didst expire on the cross, pardon me, receive me into thy heart, and change my heart, so that henceforth I may please thee as much as I have hitherto offended thee. I now renounce, for thy sake, all the pleasures which the world can give me, and I resolve to forfeit my life rather than lose thy grace. Tell me what I must do in order to please thee; I wish to do it. What pleasures, what honors, what riches can I seek? I wish only for thee, my God, my joy, my glory, my treasure, my life, my love, my all. Give me, O Lord, strength to be faithful to thee. Give me the grace to love thee, and then do with me what thou pleasest. Mary, my mother and my hope, take me under thy protection, and obtain for me the grace to belong entirely to God.

SECOND POINT.

But, according to Solomon, the goods of this world not only do not content the heart, but they are even a source of pain and affliction of spirit. "And behold, all is vanity and affliction of spirit." — Eccl. i. 14. Poor sinners! they seek for happiness in their sins, but they find nothing but bitterness and remorse. "Destruction and unhappiness in their ways, and the way of peace they have not known." — Ps. xiii. 3. What peace? What peace? "There is no peace to the wicked, saith the Lord." — Isa. xlviii. 22. In the first place, sin brings with it a dread of divine vengeance. The man who is beset by powerful enemies, neither eats nor sleeps in peace. And can he who has God for his enemy enjoy repose? "Fear to them that work evil." — Prov. x. 29. When the man who is in the state

of sin, hears the roaring of thunder, O, how does he tremble! Every leaf that moves excites terror. "The sound of dread is always in his ears." — Job xv. 21. He is always flying away, though no one pursues him. "The wicked man fleeth when no man pursueth." — Prov. xxviii. 1. He is pursued by his own sin. After having killed his brother Abel, Cain said, "Every one therefore that findeth me, shall kill me." — Gen. iv. 14. God assured him that no one should injure him. "And the Lord said to him, No; it shall not be so." — ver. 15. But notwithstanding this assurance, the Scripture tells us that Cain "dwelt a fugitive on the earth." — Ibid. He was always flying from one place to another. And who, but his own sin, was the persecutor of Cain?

Sin also brings with it remorse of conscience, that cruel worm which unceasingly gnaws the soul. If the miserable sinner go to a festivity, to a comedy, to a place of amusement, his conscience says to him, "You are the enemy of God; should you die in your sin, where shall you go?" The torture of remorse of conscience is so great even in this life, that to free themselves from it, some have committed suicide. It is related of a certain man, who had killed an infant, that, in order to get rid of the stings of remorse, he entered into a monastery; but finding no peace even there, he went before a judge, confessed his crime, and got himself condemned to death.

What is a soul without God? The Holy Ghost compares her to a sea agitated by the tempest. "The wicked are like the raging sea, which cannot rest." — Isa. lvii. 20. Were a person brought to a musical exhibition, or to a ball, and obliged to remain suspended by a cord, with his head downwards,

could he enjoy the entertainment? Such is the state of a man who lives in the enjoyment of worldly goods, but without God; his soul is as it were turned upside down. He may eat, and drink, and dance; he may wear costly apparel, and may acquire honors, dignities, and possessions; but he never shall have peace. "There is no peace to the wicked." God alone imparts peace; but he gives it to his friends, not to his enemies.

The goods of this earth, says St. Vincent Ferrer do not enter the soul. "Sunt aquæ, quæ non intrant illuc ubi est sitis." The sinner may wear embroidered robes and the richest jewels; he may indulge the palate as much as he pleases; but his poor soul shall be full of thorns and gall; and therefore, with all his riches, pleasures, and amusements, you shall see him always unhappy and ready to fly into a rage and fury at every contradiction. He who loves God resigns himself to the divine will in adversity, and enjoys peace; but he who lives in opposition to the divine will, cannot conform to it, and therefore he has no means of tranquillizing the soul. The miserable man serves the devil; he serves a tyrant, who repays him with gall and bitterness. Ah! the word of God must be verified. "Because thou didst not serve the Lord thy God with joy and gladness, thou shalt serve thy enemy in hunger, and thirst, and nakedness, and in want of all things."—Deut. xxviii. 47, 48. What do not the vindictive suffer after they have gratified their resentment? the unchaste, after they have attained their wicked object? What do not the ambitious, the avaricious endure? O! how many are there, who, if they suffered for God as much as they suffer for their own damnation, should become great saints!

Affections and Prayers..

O life misspent! O my God, if, to serve thee, I had suffered the pains which I have endured in order to offend thee, how many merits should I now find treasured up for paradise! Ah, my Lord, for what have I abandoned thee, and lost thy grace? For poisoned and momentary pleasures, which, as soon as they were indulged, disappeared, and left my soul full of thorns and bitterness. Ah, my sins, I detest you, I curse you a thousand times. I bless thy mercy, O my God, which has borne with me so patiently. I love thee, O my Creator and Redeemer, who hast given thy life for me; and because I love thee, I am sorry with my whole heart for having offended thee. My God, my God, why have I lost thee? for what have I exchanged thee? I now know the evil I have done; and I resolve to lose every thing, even life, rather than lose thy love. Give me light, O eternal Father, for the sake of Jesus Christ; make known to me thy greatness, and the nothingness of the goods which the devils present to me in order to make me lose thy grace. I love thee, but I desire to love thee with greater ardor. Grant that thou alone mayst be my only thought, my only desire, my only love. I hope for all from thy goodness, through the merits of thy Son. Mary, my mother, through the love which thou bearest to Jesus Christ, I entreat thee to obtain for me light and strength to serve him and to love him till death.

THIRD POINT.

Then all the goods and delights of this world cannot content the human heart. Who can satisfy all its desires? God alone. "Delight in the Lord,

and he will give thee the requests of thy heart." — Ps. xxxvi. 4. The heart of man is always in search of goods that will make it happy. He enjoys riches, pleasures, honors, and he is not content; for these are finite goods, and he was created for an infinite good. But let him seek God, let him unite himself with God, and behold, he is content, all his desires are satiated. "Delight in the Lord, and he will give thee the requests of thy heart." — Ps. xxxvi. 4. During all the time which St. Augustine spent in sensual delights, he never found peace. This he afterwards confessed when he gave himself to God. "Inquietum est," says the holy doctor, "cor nostrum, donec requiescat in te." *Our heart is restless till it rest in thee.* My God, I now know that all is vanity and affliction, and that you alone are the true peace of the soul. "*All things are hard, and thou alone repose.*" Hence he afterwards wrote, "Quid quæris, homuncio, quærendo bona? Quære unum bonum, in quo sunt omnia bona." *What do you seek, O miserable man? seek one good, in which are all goods.* While he was in sin, David went to his gardens, and indulged in the pleasures of the table and all other royal entertainments; but the table, the gardens, and the creatures, in which he took delight, said to him, "David, do you expect that we shall make you happy? It is not in our power to content your heart. Where is your God? Go and find your God; he alone can satisfy the cravings of your soul." Hence, in the midst of all his enjoyments, David wept continually. "My tears have been my bread day and night, whilst it is said to me daily, Where is thy God?" — Ps. xli. 4.

But, O, how content and happy does God make the faithful souls that love him! After having left all for God, without shoes, almost naked, and dead

from cold and hunger, St. Francis of Assisium enjoyed a paradise in saying, "*My God and my all.*" After he had become a religious, St. Francis Borgia was obliged, in travelling, often to lie on a bed of straw; but, so abundant were the consolations which he experienced, that he could not sleep. When St. Philip Neri left all things, he used, after going to rest, to receive so much consolation from God, that he would say, "O my Jesus, allow me to sleep." Father Charles of Lorraine, who was descended from the princes of Lorraine, and entered the Society of Jesus, began sometimes to dance through joy in his poor cell. In the plains of India, St. Francis Xavier would uncover his breast, and exclaim, *Enough, O Lord.* "Sat est, Domine." Enough, O Lord; no more consolation; my heart can bear no more. St. Teresa used to say that a single drop of heavenly consolation gives more content than all the pleasures and amusements of the world can give. Ah, God cannot but fulfil his promises to give peace and happiness to all who renounce worldly goods for his sake. "And every one that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, for my name's sake, shall receive a hundred fold, and shall possess life everlasting." — Matt. xix. 29.

What, then, do we seek after? Let us go to Jesus Christ, who calls us, saying, "Come to me, all you that labor and are burdened, and I will refresh you." — Matt. xi. 28. Ah! the soul that loves God enjoys that peace which surpasses all the pleasures and gratifications which the world and the senses can give. "Pax Dei quæ exsuperat omnem sensum." — Phil. iv. 7. It is true that, in this life, even the saints have to submit to pains and crosses; for this earth is a place of merit, and it is impossible to merit without suffering. But, accord-

ing to St. Bonaventure, divine love, like honey, renders things the most bitter, sweet and amiable. He that loves God, loves the will of God, and therefore he rejoices in sorrows, because, in embracing them, he knows that he gives delight and pleasure to his God. "Vident crucem," says St. Bernard, "sed non vident unctionem." We see the cross, but not the unction. We behold only the mortifications which the lovers of God endure, and the pleasures from which they abstain; but we do not see the spiritual delights with which the Lord consoles them. O, if sinners tasted the peace enjoyed by a soul that wishes for nothing but God! "O, taste and see," says David, "that the Lord is sweet." — Ps. xxxiii. 9. My brother, begin to make meditation every day, to communicate frequently, to converse with God; and you shall find that during the short time which you shall spend with him, he will give you greater consolation than the world, with all its amusements, has ever given you. *O, taste and see.* He who has not tasted, cannot understand how God contents the soul that loves him.

Affections and Prayers.

My dear Redeemer, how have I been hitherto so blind as to abandon thee, who art an infinite good, and the fountain of all consolation, for the miserable and momentary gratifications of the senses? I am astonished at my blindness, but I am still more astonished at thy mercy, which has so bountifully borne with me. I thank thee for making me now sensible of my folly, and of my obligation to love thee. I love thee, O my Jesus, with my whole soul, but I desire to love thee with greater fervor. Increase my desire and my love. Enamor my soul of thee, who art infinitely amiable; of thee, who

hast left nothing undone to gain my love; of thee, who so ardently desirest my love. "*If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.*" Ah, my dear Redeemer, purify my heart from all impure affections, which hinder me to love thee as I would wish! It is not in my power to inflame my whole heart with the love of thee, and to make it love nothing but thee. This requires the power of thy grace, which can do all things. Detach me from every creature, banish from my soul every affection which is not for thee, make me all thine. I am sorry above all things for all the displeasure I have given thee. I resolve to consecrate all the days of my life to thy holy love; but it is only thy grace that can make me fulfil this resolution. Grant me, O Lord, this grace for the sake of the blood which thou didst shed for me with so much pain and so much love. Let it be the glory of thy power to make my heart, which was once full of earthly affections, now become all flames of love for thee, O infinite Good. O mother of fair love, O Mary, by thy prayers, make my whole soul burn, as thine did, with the charity of God.

TWENTY-SECOND CONSIDERATION.

ON EVIL HABITS.

"The wicked man, when he is come into the depth of sins, contemneth."—Prov. xviii. 3.

FIRST POINT.

THE evil inclination to sin is one of the greatest injuries which we have received from the sin of

Adam. This made the apostle weep when he saw himself impelled by concupiscence to the very evil which he abhorred. "I see another law in my members . . . . captivating me in the law of sin."—Rom. vii. 23. Hence it is so difficult for us, who are drawn to evil by this concupiscence and by so many enemies, to reach, without sin, the land of bliss. What would you say of a traveller who, being obliged to cross an agitated sea in a shattered vessel, would load the ship with a burden which, even in a calm sea, would be sufficient to sink the vessel? What hopes could you entertain of the safety of such a man? Now, we may say the same of the man who has contracted an evil habit: he must pass the sea of this life (a sea always tempestuous, in which so many perish) in the weak and shattered vessel of the flesh, to which we are united; and he overloads this vessel with sins of habit. It is very difficult for such a man to save his soul; because a bad habit blinds the understanding, hardens the heart, and thus makes the sinner obstinate till death.

First, a bad habit blinds the understanding. Why do the saints always implore light from God, and tremble lest they should become the greatest sinners in the world? Because they know that if they lose God's light, they may commit the greatest crimes. How does it happen that so many Christians live obstinately in sin until they are lost in the end? "Their own malice blinded them."—Wis. ii. 21. Sin blinds them, and thus they are lost. Every sin produces blindness; the more sins are multiplied, the greater the blindness they produce. God is our light; and therefore, the farther the soul is removed from God, the more blind she becomes. "His bones," says Job, "shall be filled

with the vices of his youth." — Job xx. 11. As the light of the sun cannot enter a vessel filled with clay, so a heart replete with vices cannot admit the light of God. Hence we see certain sinners lose the divine light, so that they go on from sin to sin without ever thinking of repentance. "The wicked walk round about." — Ps. xi. 9. Fallen into the dark pit of sin, they do nothing but commit sins, they speak only of sins, they think only of sinning, and scarcely feel any longer that sin is an evil. "Ipsa consuetudo mali," says St. Augustine, "non sinit peccatores videre malum quod faciunt." The very habit of sin does not allow them to see the evil which they do. Hence they live as if they no longer believed in the existence of God, of heaven, hell, or eternity.

And behold, after an evil habit is contracted, the sins which before excited horror, are now viewed with indifference. "Make them," says David, "like a wheel, and as stubble before the wind." — Ps. lxxxii. 14. See, says Gregory, how a straw is blown about by every breath of air. In like manner a person, before he falls into sin, resists and combats temptations, at least for some time; but, after having contracted a bad habit, he yields instantly to every temptation, and falls in every occasion of sin; and why? Because the habit of sin has deprived him of light. St. Anselm says, that the devil acts towards certain sinners like a person who fastens a cord to a bird; he allows it to fly away, but whenever he pleases, draws it back to the earth. These are, according to the saint, habitual sinners. "Pravo usu irretiti ab hoste tenentur, volantes in eadem vitia dejiciuntur." — *Ap. Edinor.*, in vita, lib. ii. St. Bernardine says (tom. iv. serm. xv.) that some continue to commit sin,

without being exposed to any dangerous occasion. He compares habitual sinners to the wings of a windmill, which *are driven round by every wind*, and turn the mill even when there is no corn to be ground, and against the will of the master. You shall find habitual sinners, who indulge in bad thoughts even without any occasion to excite them, without pleasure, and drawn into them as it were involuntarily and forcibly, by the effects of evil habits. "Dura res est consuetudo," says St. John Chrysostom, "quæ nonnunquam nolentes committere cogit illicita." Yes, as St. Augustine says, a bad habit brings on a certain necessity. "Dum consuetudini non resistitur, facta est necessitas." And according to St. Bernardine, evil habits are changed into our nature. "Usus vertitur in naturam." Hence, as it is necessary for a man to breathe, so it appears that habitual sinners become the slaves of sin, and bring themselves into a necessity of falling into sin. I have said that they become slaves of sin. There are servants, who serve for wages, and slaves, who serve by force and without remuneration. To these we may compare certain miserable men, who sin even without pleasure.

"The wicked man, when he is come into the depth of sins, contemneth."—Prov. xviii. 3. This passage St. Chrysostom explains of habitual sinners, who, sunk in an abyss of darkness, despise corrections, sermons, censures, hell, and God; they despise every thing, and resemble the vulture, which waits to be killed by the fowler, rather than abandon the dead body on which it feeds. Father Recupito relates that a man condemned to death, even when going to the place of execution, raised his eyes, saw a young female, and consented to a

bad thought. Father Gisolfo relates that a blasphêmer, who had been likewise condemned to death, when thrown off the scaffold, broke out into a blasphemy. St. Bernard goes so far as to say that it is almost useless to pray for habitual sinners, — that we must weep over them as lost forever. If they no longer see their danger, how can they escape the precipice? To preserve them from it, a miracle of grace is necessary. The miserable wretches shall open their eyes in hell, when the sight of their misery shall serve only to make them weep more bitterly over their folly.

Affections and Prayers.

My God, thou hast bestowed more favors on me than on others, and I have done greater injuries to thee than any person whom I know. O sorrowful heart of my Redeemer, so much afflicted and tortured on the cross at the sight of my sins, give me through thy merits a lively sense of my faults, and a lively sorrow for them. Ah, my Jesus, I am full of vices, but thou art omnipotent; thou canst easily fill my soul with thy holy love. I therefore hope in thee, who art infinite goodness and infinite mercy. I repent, O Sovereign Good, of having offended thee. O that I had died rather than have ever offended thee! I have forgotten thee; but thou hast not forgotten me: this I see with the light which thou now givest me. Since, then, thou gavest me this light, give me also strength to be faithful to thee. I promise to die a thousand times rather than ever turn my back upon thee. But in thy aid I place my hopes. "In thee, O Lord, I I have hoped; let me never be confounded." I hope, O my Jesus, in thee, that I shall never more see myself confounded in sin, and deprived of thy

grace. To thee also, O Mary, my mistress, I turn. In thee, O Lady, I have hoped; let me not be confounded forever. O my hope, I trust in thy intercession, that I shall never again see myself the enemy of thy Son. Ah, beg of him to strike me dead rather than abandon me to this sovereign misfortune.

SECOND POINT.

A bad habit hardens the heart. "Cor durum," says Cornelius a Lapide, "efficit consuetudo peccandi." And this hardness of heart God justly permits in punishment of resisting his calls. "The Lord," says the apostle, "hath mercy on whom he will; and whom he will he hardeneth." — Rom. ix. 18. According to St. Augustine, God hardens the sinner by not showing mercy; "Obduratio Dei est nolle misereri." It is not that God directly hardens habitual sinners, but he subtracts his graces in punishment of their ingratitude for past favors, and thus their heart becomes hard like a stone. "His heart shall be as hard as a stone, and as firm as a smith's anvil." — Job xli. 15. Hence it is that, while others are softened, and shed tears in hearing sermons on the rigor of divine justice, on the pains of the damned, or on the passion of Jesus Christ, the habitual sinner will remain unmoved; he will speak, and listen to others speaking, on these subjects, with as much indifference as if they did not concern him; and thus these sermons shall serve to render him more obdurate. "His heart shall be firm as a smith's anvil."

Even sudden deaths, earthquakes, thunder and lightning, shall no longer strike terror into the heart of the habitual sinner; instead of awaking, and making him enter into himself, they shall rather en-

courage him in the deadly sleep of death and perdition in which he slumbers. "At thy rebuke, O God of Jacob, they have all slumbered." — Ps. lxxv. 7. An evil habit gradually takes away all remorse of conscience; to the habitual sinner crimes the most enormous appear trifling. "Peccata quamvis horrenda," says St. Augustine, "cum in consuetudinem veniunt, parva, aut nulla esse videntur." The commission of sin is naturally accompanied with shame; but, according to St. Jerome, they who contract evil habits lose even the shame of committing sin. "Qui ne pudorem quidem habent in delictis." St. Peter compares the habitual sinner to the sow that wallows in the mire. As the sow wallowing in the mire feels not its stench, so the habitual sinner perceives not the stench of his crimes, which disgusts all others. And, says St. Bernardine, what wonder is it that, after the mire of sin has blinded him, he should not see his miserable condition, even when God scourges him for his iniquities? "Populus immergit se in peccatis, sicut sus in volutabro luti: quid mirum si Dei flagellantis futura judicia non cognoscit." — Part ii. page 182. Hence it happens that, instead of regretting his sins, he rejoices at them, he laughs at them, and boasts of them. "They are glad when they have done evil." — Prov. ii. 14. "A fool worketh mischief as it were for sport." — Prov. x. 23. Are not these clear signs of diabolical obduracy? They are, says St. Thomas of Villanova, all signs of damnation. "Induratio damnationis indicium." My brother, tremble lest this may happen to you. If you have contracted any evil habit, endeavor to abandon it now that God calls you. Rejoice and be glad as long as conscience reproves you; for it is a sign that God has not as yet abandoned

you; but amend, and instantly shake off the bad habits; if you do not, the wound shall become gangrenous, and you shall be lost.

Affections and Prayers.

O Lord, how shall I be able to thank thee as I ought for so many graces which thou hast bestowed upon me? How often hast thou called, and I have resisted! Instead of being grateful to thee, and loving thee, for having delivered me from hell, and for having called me with so much love, I have continued to provoke thy wrath, by offering repeated insults to thee. O my God, I will no longer outrage thy patience; I have offended thee enough. Thou alone, who art infinite goodness, couldst have borne with me till the present moment. But I now see that thou canst bear no longer with me. Pardon me then, O my Lord and my Sovereign Good; pardon me all the injuries I have offered to thee. I am sorry for them with my whole heart, and purpose never more to offend thee. Shall I forever continue to provoke thee? Ah! be appeased with me, O God of my soul, not through my merits, for which nothing else is reserved but vengeance and hell, but through the merits of thy Son and my Redeemer, in which I place all my hopes. For the love of Jesus Christ receive me into favor, and give me perseverance in thy love. Banish from me all impure affections, and draw me entirely to thyself. I love thee, O supreme God; I love thee, O sovereign Lover of souls, who art worthy of infinite love. O that I had always loved thee! O Mary, my mother, obtain for me the grace to spend the remainder of my life not in offending, but in loving thy Son, and in bewailing the displeasure I have given him.

THIRD POINT.

When the understanding is deprived of light, and the heart hardened, the sinner ordinarily makes a bad end, and dies obstinate in his sin. "A hard heart shall fare ill at the end." — Eccl. iii. 27. The just continue to walk in the straight path. "The path of the just is right to walk in." — Isa. xxvi. 7. But habitual sinners always "walk round about." — Ps. xi. 9. They give up sin for a little, and afterwards return to it. Their damnation St. Bernard regards as certain. "Væ homini qui sequitur hunc circuitum." — Serm. xii., sup. Psal. xc. Some of them say, "I will amend before death;" but it is very difficult for an habitual sinner, even in his old age, to change his life. "A young man," says the Holy Ghost, "according to his way, even when he is old he will not depart from it." — Prov. xxii. 6. We are very weak. "Your strength," says the prophet Isaias, "shall be as the ashes of tow." — Isa. i. 31. Hence, as St. Thomas of Villanova says, (Conc. iv. Dom. Quad. 4,) the soul deprived of grace cannot abstain from committing new sins. "Quo fit ut anima a gratia destituta diu evadere ulteriora peccata non possit." But would it not be the extreme of folly to play for, and voluntarily to lose, all your property, with the hope of winning it back in the last game? Such the folly of the man who continues to live in the midst of sins, and hopes in the last moments of life to repair all the evil he has done. Can the Ethiopian or the leopard change the color of his skin? And how can he who has long indulged in the habit of sin, lead a good life? "If," says the prophet Jeremias, "the Ethiopian can change his skin, or the leopard his spots, you also may do well when you have learned

evil." — Jer. xiii. 23. Hence the habitual sinner, in the end, abandons himself to despair. Such the manner in which his life terminates. "But he that is hardened in mind shall fall into evil." — Prov. xxviii. 14.

On the words of Job, "He hath torn me with wound upon wound, he hath rushed in upon me like a giant," (Job xvi. 15,) St. Gregory says that a person may, perhaps, be able to defend himself after the first wound; but, after every additional one, he loses strength, till in the end he loses his life. So it is with sin. After the first and second transgression, the sinner shall have some strength, (that is, through the aid of God's grace;) but, if he continue in the habit of sin, it shall rush on him like a giant. How is it possible for the sinner to escape death after his strength has been diminished, and his wounds multiplied? "Sin," as the prophet Jeremias says, "like a huge stone, oppresses the sinner." — Lam. iii. 53. St. Bernard compares the habitual sinner to a man who has fallen under a large stone, which he has not strength to remove. It is as difficult for the former to shake off his bad habits, as it is for the latter to get rid of the load that presses upon him. "The man on whom the weight of a bad habit presses, rises with difficulty."

The habitual sinner may say, "Is my salvation then hopeless?" No, you are not beyond hope; if you wish to apply it, there is still a remedy for the past But a certain author says, that in grievous maladies very severe remedies are necessary. "Præstat in magnis morbis a magnis auxiliis initium medendi sumere." — Cardin. Meth., cap. xvi. If to a sick man in danger of death, and unwilling to take medicine, because he is not aware of the malignity of his disease, the physician said "Friend, you shall

certainly die unless you take such a medicine," what should be the answer of the invalid? "Since," he would say, "my life is in danger, I am ready to obey all your directions." Dearly beloved Christian, if you are an habitual sinner, I say the same to you. You are very ill; you are one of those invalids who, as St. Thomas of Villanova says, *are seldom cured;* you are on the brink of perdition. But if you wish to recover from your illness, there is a remedy for you; however, you must not expect a miracle of grace. You must on your part labor hard to take away the occasions of sin, to avoid bad company, to resist temptations by recommending yourself to God as soon as you perceive them: you must adopt the means of salvation, by going frequently to confession, by reading a spiritual book every day, by practising devotion to most holy Mary, and continually imploring her to obtain for you strength not to relapse into sin. You must do violence to yourself; otherwise the threat of the Lord against obstinate sinners shall fall upon you. "You shall die in your sin." — John viii. 21. And if you do not adopt these means now that the Lord gives you light, you shall scarcely adopt them hereafter. Listen to God calling you to repentance. *Lazarus, come forth.* Poor sinner! you are long dead; go forth from the dark grave of your sinful life. Respond at once to the call, and give yourself instantly to God. Tremble lest this should be the last call for you.

Affections and Prayers.

Ah! my God, what do I wait for? Will I wait till thou dost abandon me and send me to hell? Ah! Lord, bear with me; I wish to change my life, and to give myself to thee. Tell me what I must do, and I will do it. O blood of Jesus, assist me

O Mary, advocate of sinners, come to my relief. O eternal Father, have mercy on me through the merits of Jesus and Mary. I am sorry, O God of infinite goodness, for having offended thee, and I love thee above all things. Pardon me for the sake of Jesus Christ, and give me thy love. Give me also a great fear of being lost, should I again offend thee. Light, O my God, light and strength. I hope for every thing from thy mercy. Thou didst bestow so many graces on me when I wandered at a distance from thee, I hope for far greater graces, now that I return to thee, resolved to love nothing but thee. I love thee, my God, my life, my all. I love thee also, O my mother, Mary; to thee I consign my soul; preserve it by thy intercession from ever returning to a state of enmity with God.

TWENTY-THIRD CONSIDERATION.

THE DELUSIONS WHICH THE DEVIL SUGGESTS TO SINNERS.

[Although the preceding considerations contain many of the sentiments contained in this, it will be useful to collect them all together, in order to overturn the usual delusions by which the devil succeeds in inducing sinners to relapse.]

FIRST POINT.

Let us imagine a young man who has fallen into grievous sins, which he has already confessed, and who is restored to the friendship of God. The devil again tempts him to relapse; the young man resists for a while, but in consequence of the delu-

sions suggested by the enemy, he begins to vacillate. "Tell me, young man," I say to him, "what will you do? Will you now, for this miserable pleasure, forfeit the grace of God, which you have just acquired, and which is more valuable than the whole world? Will you yourself write the sentence of eternal death, and condemn yourself to burn forever in hell?" "No," you answer, "*I do not wish to damn myself; I wish to be saved; if I commit this sin, I will afterwards confess it.*" Behold the first delusion of the devil! Then you say that you will afterwards confess it; but in the mean time you lose your soul. Tell me, if you had a jewel worth a thousand crowns, would you throw it into a river, saying, "I will make a diligent search for it, and hope to find it?" You hold in your hand the precious jewel of your soul, which Jesus Christ has purchased with his blood, and you voluntarily cast it into hell, (for in punishment of every mortal sin, you are condemned to eternal fire,) and say, "I hope to recover it by a good confession." But should you not recover it, what shall be the consequence? To recover the divine grace, true repentance, which is the gift of God, is necessary. Should God not give you the grace of repentance, should death overtake you, and not allow you time to go to confession, what shall become of you?

You say that you will go to confession before the lapse of a week. And who promises you that you shall live for a week? You then say that you will go to confession to-morrow. And who promises you to-morrow? St. Augustine says, "God has not promised to-morrow: perhaps he will give it, and perhaps he will not." Perhaps he will deny it to you, as he has to so many others who have gone to bed in good health, and have been found dead in

the morning. How many have been struck dead in the act of sin, and sent to hell! And should the same happen to you, how shall you be able to repair your eternal ruin? Be assured that by this delusion, *I will afterwards go to confession*, the devil has brought thousands and thousands of Christians to hell. It is difficult to find a sinner so abandoned to despair as to wish for his own damnation. In committing sin, all sinners hope to repent and go to confession; it is thus that so many miserable souls are lost; and now there is no remedy for their damnation.

But you say, "*At present I cannot resist this temptation.*" Behold the second delusion of the devil, who makes it appear to you that at present you have not strength to resist your passions. First, it is necessary to know that, as the apostle says, "God is faithful, and never permits us to be tempted above our strength."—1 Cor. x. 13. Moreover, I ask, if you are now unable to resist your passions, how shall you be able to resist them hereafter? After you have yielded to one temptation, the devil shall tempt you to other sins, and by your consent to sin he shall have gained an increase of strength against you, and you shall have become weaker. If, then, you are now unable to extinguish the flame of passion, how can you expect to extinguish it when it shall have grown stronger? You say, God will give you his aid. But this aid he gives you at present. Why, then, do you not correspond with his grace and conquer your passion? Perhaps you expect that God will give you more abundant helps and graces after you have multiplied sins. If at present you wish for greater help and strength, why do you not ask them from God? "Ask and it shall be given you."—Matt. vii. 7. God cannot violate his promise. Have recourse to him, and he

will give you the strength which you require in order to resist every temptation. "God does not command impossibilities," says the Council of Trent, Sess. vi. cap. xi.; "but by his commands he admonishes us to do what we can with the actual aid which he gives us; and when this aid is not sufficient to enable us to resist temptations, he exhorts us to ask additional help, which he gives whenever we pray for it."

Affections and Prayers.

Then, my God, why hast thou been so bountiful to me, and I so ungrateful to thee? We have been engaged in a mutual contest. I fled away from thee, and thou didst seek after me. Thou didst confer benefits on me, I offered insults to thee. Ah, Lord! the goodness alone which thou hast shown me ought to enamor me of thee; for, when I multiplied sins, thou didst multiply thy graces. And when have I merited the light which thou now givest me? My Lord, I thank thee for it with my whole heart, and I hope to thank thee for it eternally in heaven. I hope in thy blood for eternal salvation, and I hope for it with certainty, since thou hast treated me with so much mercy. I hope that thou wilt give me grace never more to betray thee. I purpose, with thy grace, to die a thousand times rather than ever again offend thee. I have offended thee sufficiently. During the remainder of my life I wish to love thee. And how can I but love a God who, after having died for me, has waited for me with so much patience, in spite of the numberless injuries I have done him? O God of my soul, I repent of all my sins with my whole heart; I would wish to die of sorrow for them. But if I have hitherto turned my back upon thee, I now love thee

above all things; I love thee more than myself. Eternal Father, through the merits of Jesus Christ, assist a miserable sinner, who wishes to love thee. Mary, my hope, assist me; obtain for me the grace always to have recourse to thy Son and to thee, as often as the devil shall tempt me to offend God again.

SECOND POINT.

"*God is merciful.*" Behold the third delusion of sinners, by which an immense number are lost! A learned author says, that the mercy of God sends more souls to hell than his justice; for sinners are induced, by a rash confidence in the divine mercy, to continue in sin, and thus are lost. God is merciful. Who denies it? But great as is his mercy, how many does he send to hell every day! God is merciful; but he is also just; and therefore he is bound to punish those who offend him. He shows mercy; but to whom? To them who fear him. "He hath strengthened his mercy towards them that fear him. As a father hath compassion on his children, so hath the Lord compassion on them that fear him." — Ps. cii. 11, 13. But he executes justice on those who despise him, and abuse his mercy to insult him the worse. God pardons sin; but he cannot pardon the will or determination to sin. St. Augustine says, that he who sins with the intention of afterwards repenting, is not a penitent, but a mocker of God's majesty. "Irrisor est non pœnitens." But the apostle tells us that God does not allow himself to be mocked. "Be not deceived. God is not mocked." — Gal. vi. 7. It would be a mockery of God to insult him as often and as much as you please, and afterwards to expect heaven.

"*But as God has shown me so many mercies hith-*

erto, so I hope he will treat me with mercy hereafter." Behold the fourth delusion! Then, must the Lord, because he has had compassion on you, show mercy forever, and never chastise you? No; the greater have been his mercies to you, the more you have reason to fear that, if you offend him again, he will pardon you no more, but will take vengeance on your sins. "Say not, I have sinned, and what harm hath befallen me? for the Most High is a patient rewarder." — Eccl. v. 4. Say not, I have sinned, and have not been punished; for though God bears, he does not bear forever. When the number of mercies which he has resolved to show to the sinner is exhausted, he then punishes all his sins together. And the longer God has waited for his repentance, the more severe shall be his punishment. "Quos diutius expectat," says St. Gregory, "durius damnat."

If, then, O my brother, you see that you have often offended God, and that he has not sent you to hell, you should say, "The mercies of the Lord that we are not consumed." — Lam. iii. 22. Lord, I thank thee for not having sent me to hell, as I deserved. Consider how many have been damned for fewer sins than you have committed, and labor to atone, by penance and other good works, for the offences you have offered to God. The patience which he has had with you, and the great mercies which he has shown to you, and not to others, ought to animate you not to offend him again, but to serve and love him.

Affections and Prayers.

My crucified Jesus, my Redeemer, and my God, behold a traitor at thy feet. I am ashamed to appear before thee. How often have I mocked thee!

How often have I promised to offend thee no more! But my promises have been so many treasons; for when the occasion of sin was presented to me, I have forgotten thee, and have again turned my back upon thee. I thank thee that I am not now in hell, but at thy feet, where thou enlightenest me, and callest me to thy love. Yes; I wish to love thee, my Savior and my God, and I wish never more to despise thee. Thou hast borne with me long enough. I see that thou canst bear with me no longer. Unhappy me, if, after so many graces, I offend thee again! Lord, I sincerely wish and resolve to change my life; I wish to love thee as much as I have offended thee. It consoles me to have to deal with thee, who art infinite goodness. But I am sorry above all things for having so much despised thee; and I promise thee all my love for the future. Pardon me through the merits of thy passion; forget the injuries I have done thee, and give me strength to be faithful to thee during the remainder of my life. I love thee, O my Sovereign Good, and I hope to love thee forever. My dear God, I will never more abandon thee. O Mary, mother of God, bind me to Jesus Christ, and obtain me the grace never again to depart from his feet. In thee I trust.

THIRD POINT.

"*But I am young. God compassionates youth. I will hereafter give myself to God.*" We are now at the fifth delusion. But do you not know that God counts, not the years, but the sins of each individual? You are young! But how many sins have you committed? There are many persons of very advanced age who have not been guilty of the tenth part of the sins which you have committed

And do you not know that God has fixed the number and measure of sins which he will pardon each? "The Lord waiteth patiently," says the holy Scripture, "that when the day of judgment shall come, he may punish them in the fulness of their sins." — 2 Macch. vi. 14. That is, God has patience, and waits for a certain time; but when the measure of sins which he has resolved to pardon, is filled up, he pardons no more, but chastises the sinner by sending him a sudden death while in the state of damnation; or he abandons him in his sin — a chastisement worse than death. "I will take away the hedge thereof, and it shall be wasted." — Isa. v. 5. If you had encompassed a field with a hedge, and cultivated it for many years, and found that, after all your labor and expense, it produced no fruit, what would you do with it? Would you not take away the hedge and abandon it? Tremble lest God should treat you in a similar manner. If you continue to offend him, you shall gradually lose remorse of conscience; you shall cease to think of eternity, or of the salvation of your soul; you shall lose all light and fear: behold the hedge taken away; behold your soul already abandoned by God.

Let us come to the last delusion. You say, "*It is true that, if I commit this sin, I shall lose the grace of God, and shall be condemned to hell; it may be that in punishment of it I shall be damned, but it may also happen that I shall afterwards make a good confession, and save my soul.*" Yes, it may, I admit, happen that you shall be saved; for I am not a prophet, and therefore cannot say for certain, that, if you commit this sin, God will show you no more mercy. But you cannot deny that, if, after the great graces which God has bestowed upon

you, you offend him again, you shall expose yourself to very great danger of being lost forever. Attend to the language of the Scripture — "A hard heart shall fare evil at the last." — Eccl. iii. 27. "Evil doers shall be cut off." — Ps. xxxvi. 9. The wicked shall in the end be cut off by divine justice. "What things a man shall sow, those also shall he reap." — Gal. vi. 8. He that sows sins shall reap nothing but pains and torments. "I called, and you refused. . . . . I will laugh in your destruction, and will mock when that shall come to you which you feared." — Prov. i. 24. I have called you, says the Lord, and you have mocked me; but I will mock you at the hour of death. "Revenge is mine, and I will repay *them* in due time." — Deut. xxxii. 35. To me belongs the punishment due to sins; I will inflict it when the time of vengeance arrives. Such the threats of the Scriptures against obstinate sinners; such the chastisement which reason and justice demand. You say, "*It may happen, after all, that I shall be saved.*" I again admit that this may happen; but is it not the height of folly to trust the eternal salvation of your soul to a *perhaps?* — to a possibility of escaping hell when your salvation is very improbable? Is eternal life an affair to be exposed to such eminent danger?

Affections and Prayers.

My dear Redeemer, prostrate at thy feet, I thank thee for not having abandoned me after I had committed so many sins. How many, who have offended thee less than I have, shall never receive the light which thou now givest me! I see that thou dost earnestly desire my salvation, and I wish to be saved, principally for the sake of pleasing thee. I

wish for heaven, that there I may eternally sing the mercies which thou hast shown me. I hope that thou hast already pardoned me. But should I still be thy enemy, in consequence of not repenting as I ought of the offences I have offered to thee, I am now sorry for them with my whole soul; they displease me above all things. Pardon me for thy mercy's sake, and increase continually my sorrow for having offended thee, who art so good a God. Give me sorrow — give me love. I love thee above all things, but I love thee too little. I wish to love thee ardently. This love I ask and hope for from thee. Hear me, O my Jesus; thou hast promised to hear all who pray to thee. O Mary, mother of God, all tell me that thou never dost allow a soul that recommends herself to thee, to go away disconsolate. I trust in thee; recommend me to thy Son, and obtain for me eternal life.

TWENTY-FOURTH CONSIDERATION.

ON THE PARTICULAR JUDGMENT.

"We must all be manifested before the judgment-seat of Christ." — 2 Cor. v. 10.

FIRST POINT.

Consider the appearance, the accusation, the examination, and the sentence. With regard to the appearance of the soul before her Judge, it is the common opinion of theologians, that the particular judgment takes place at the very moment of death; and that on the very spot where the soul is

separated from the body, she is judged by Jesus Christ, who shall not send, but will come himself, to judge her according to her works. "At what hour you think not, the Son of man will come." — Luke xii. 40. "He will," says St. Augustine, "come in love to the good, in terror to the wicked." O, how great shall be the terror of the soul the first time she shall see the Redeemer, and she shall see his countenance full of wrath! "Who," says the prophet Nahum, "shall stand before the face of his indignation?" — Nahum i. 6. This thought made Father Lewis da Ponte tremble so as to shake the cell in which he lay. Hearing the *Dies Iræ* sung, and reflecting on the terror of the soul when she shall be presented before the tribunal of Jesus Christ, the venerable P. Juvenal Ancina took, and afterwards executed, the resolution of forsaking the world. The sight of the wrath of the Judge shall announce the sentence. "The wrath of the king *is as* messengers of death." — Prov. xvi. 14. St. Bernard says that the soul shall suffer more in seeing the indignation of Jesus Christ, than in hell itself. "Mallet esse in inferno." When presented before an earthly judge, criminals have been known to fall into a cold sweat. Such was the confusion which Piso felt at the thought of appearing as a criminal before the senate, that he killed himself. How great is the pain of a child, or of a vassal, in appearing before an angry parent, or an enraged sovereign! O, how much greater shall be the pain and confusion of the soul when she shall behold Jesus Christ enraged against her for the insults which she offered to him during life! "They shall look upon me, whom they have pierced." — Zach. xii. 10. The soul shall see in wrath the Lamb that bore with her

so patiently during life, and that there is no hope of appeasing his anger. This shall make her call upon the mountains to fall upon her, and to hide her from the fury of the wrathful Lamb. — Apoc. vi. 16. Speaking of judgment, St. Luke says, "Then they shall see the Son of man." — Luke xxi. 27. O, what pain shall the sight of the Judge in the form of a man excite in the soul of the sinner! The sight of a man-God, who had died for his salvation, shall upbraid him with his ingratitude. When the Savior ascended into heaven, the angels said to the disciples, "This Jesus, who is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come as you have seen him going into heaven." — Acts i. 11.

With the same wounds with which he ascended into heaven, Jesus Christ shall come to judge the soul. "Great joy of the beholders," says the abbot Rupert, "great terror of those who are in expectation." The wounds of the Redeemer shall console the just and terrify the wicked. When Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph, whom you sold," the Scripture tells us, that, through fear, they were silent and unable to utter a word. "His brethren could not answer him, being struck with exceeding great fear." — Gen. xlv. 3. Now, what answer shall the sinner make to Jesus Christ? Will he dare to ask mercy when he must first render an account of his abuse of the mercy which he has received? "With what face," says Eusebius Emissenus, "will you, who are to be first judged for contempt of mercy, ask for mercy?" What then shall become of him? "Where," says St. Augustine, "shall he fly? He shall behold an angry Judge above; hell open below; on one side, his own sins accusing him; on the other, the devils ready to inflict chastisement; and within,

the remorses of his own conscience. 'Above, shall be an enraged Judge; below, a frightful chaos; on the right, sins accusing him; on the left, the devils dragging him to punishment; within, a burning conscience; whither shall the sinner beset in this manner fly?'"

Affections and Prayers.

O my Jesus, I will always call thee Jesus. Thy name consoles and encourages me, because it reminds me that thou art my Savior, who hast died for my salvation. Behold me at thy feet. I acknowledge that I have deserved hell as often as I have offended thee by mortal sin. I am unworthy of pardon, but thou hast died to merit pardon for me. Pardon me, then, immediately, O my Jesus, before thou comest to judge me. I shall not then be able to ask pardon; I can now ask it from thee, and I hope for it. Thy wounds shall then fill me with terror, but now they give me confidence. My dear Redeemer, I am sorry above all things for having offended thy infinite goodness. I purpose to submit to every pain, every loss, rather than forfeit thy grace. I love thee with my whole heart. Have pity on me. "Have mercy on me, O God, according to thy great mercy." O Mary, mother of mercy, obtain for me a great sorrow for my sins, pardon, and perseverance in the divine love. I love thee, O my queen, and trust in thee.

SECOND POINT.

Consider the accusation and scrutiny. "The judgment sat and the books were opened." — Dan. vii. 10. There shall be two books, the Gospel and conscience. In the Gospel shall be read what the

accused should have done, and in his conscience, what he has done. *Each individual*, says St. Jerome, *shall see what he has done.* In the balance of divine justice, neither riches, nor dignities, nor nobility, but works only, shall have weight. "Thou art weighed in the balance," said Daniel to Balthassar, "and art found wanting." — Dan. v. 27. Neither his gold, says Father Alvarez, nor his wealth, but the king alone, is weighed. The accusers shall then come forward; and first of all the devil. "The devil," says St. Augustine, "shall be at hand, and shall recite the words of your profession. He will charge us before our face with all that we have done, he will state the day and the hour in which we have sinned." — Con. Jud. tom. vi. *He will recite the words of your profession;* that is, he will bring forward the promises we have made and afterwards violated; he will recount all our sins, pointing to the day and hour in which they were committed. According to St. Cyprian, he will then say to the Judge, "I have suffered neither stripes nor scourges for these men." I have suffered nothing for this ungrateful sinner; and, to become my slave, he has forsaken you, who have died for his salvation; he therefore belongs to me. Their angel-guardians shall also, as Origen says, accuse sinners; each of them shall say, I have labored so many years for the salvation of that man, but he has despised my admonitions. "Unusquisque angelorum perhibet testimonium quot annis circa eum laboraverit, sed ille monita sprevit." — Hom. lxvi. Thus his very friends shall then despise him. — Lam. i. 2. The very walls within which he sinned shall bear witness against the sinner. "The stone shall cry out of the wall." — Habacuc ii. 11. His own conscience shall accuse him. "Their conscience,"

says St. Paul, "bearing witness to them .... in the day when God shall judge the secrets of men." — Rom. ii. 15, 16. Their very sins, says St. Bernard, shall speak and say, "You have made us; we are your works; we shall not desert you." — Lib. Med. cap. ii. Finally, according to St. Chrysostom, the wounds of Jesus Christ shall accuse the sinner; "The nails shall complain of thee, the wounds and the cross of Christ shall speak against thee." "Clavi de te conquerentur, cicatrices contra te loquentur: crux Christi contra te perorabit." — Hom. in Matt. The scrutiny shall now commence.

"I," says the Lord, "will search Jerusalem with lamps." — Soph. i. 12. The lamp, says Mendozza, penetrates every corner of the house. "Lucerna omnes angulos permeat." In explaining the words *with lamps*, Cornelius a Lapide says, that God shall then place before the sinner the examples of the saints, all the lights and inspirations bestowed upon him during his life, and all the years that had been given him that he might do good. "He hath called against me the time." — Lam. i. 15. The sinner shall have to render an account of every glance of the eye. "Exigetur a te," says St. Anselm, "usque ad ictum oculi." According to the prophet Malachy, the Lord "shall purify the sons of Levi, and shall refine them as gold." — Mal. iii. 3. As gold is refined by removing the dross, so our good works, our confessions and communions, shall be subjected to a severe examination. "When I shall take a time, I will judge justices." — Ps. lxxiv. 3. In fine, St. Peter tells us that, at judgment, the just shall scarcely be saved. "If the just man shall scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?" — 1 Peter iv. 18. If the sinner must answer for every idle word, what account shall he

have to give for consenting to so many bad thoughts, for uttering so many obscene words? Si de verbo otioso ratio poscitur quid de verbo impuritatis? Speaking of the authors of scandal, who have robbed him of so many souls, the Lord says, "I will meet them as a bear that is robbed of her whelps." — Osee xiii. 8. With regard to works, the Judge shall say, "Give her of the fruit of her hands." — Prov. xxxi. 31. Reward him according to the works which he has performed.

Affections and Prayers.

Ah, my Jesus, wert thou now to reward me according to my works, hell should be my lot. O God, how often have I myself written the sentence of my condemnation to that place of torments! I thank thee for the patience with which thou hast borne me so long. O God, were I now obliged to appear before thy judgment-seat, what account should I have to render of my past life! "*Enter not into judgment with thy servant.*" Ah, Lord, wait for me a little longer; do not judge me yet. Wert thou now to judge me, what should become of me? Wait for me; since thou hast treated me with so many mercies hitherto, grant me this new favor, — infuse into my heart a great sorrow for my sins. I am sorry, O infinite Good, for having so often despised thee. I love thee above all things. Eternal Father, pardon me for the love of Jesus Christ; and, through his merits, grant me holy perseverance. My Jesus, I hope for all things from thy blood. Most holy Mary, in thee I trust. "Turn, then, O most gracious advocate, thy eyes of mercy towards us." Behold my miseries, and have pity on me.

THIRD POINT.

In fine, to obtain eternal life, the soul must be found at judgment to have led a life conformable to the life of Jesus Christ. "Whom he foreknew, he predestinated to be made conformable to the image of his Son." — Rom. viii. 29. It was this that made Job tremble. "What shall I do when God shall rise to judge me? and when he shall examine, what shall I answer him?" — Job xxxi. 14. Philip the Second, rebuking a domestic for having told him a lie, said to him, "*Is it thus you deceive me?*" The domestic went home, and died of grief. What shall the sinner do? What answer shall he make to Jesus Christ, his Judge? He shall, like the man in the Gospel, who came to the feast without the nuptial garment, remain silent, because he shall not know what to answer. — Matt. xxii. 12. "His very sins shall close the sinner's mouth." — "All iniquity shall stop her mouth." — Ps. cvi. 42. St. Basil says that the sinner shall then suffer more from shame, than from the very fire of hell. "Horridior quam ignis, erit pudor."

Finally, the Judge will pass sentence. "Depart from me, you cursed, into everlasting fire." — Matt. xxv. 41. O, what an awful thunder-clap shall that sentence be to the sinner! "O, how frightfully," says the Carthusian, "shall that thunder resound!" "He," says St. Anselm, "that does not tremble at such thunder, sleeps not, but is dead." Eusebius writes, that the terror of sinners at hearing the sentence of their condemnation, shall be so great, that, if they could, they would die again. "The wicked shall be seized with such dismay at the sight of the Judge pronouncing sentence, that, were they not immortal, they should die a second time." There

is then no more time for prayer, no more intercessors whom the sinner can invoke. "There," says St. Thomas of Villanova, "there is no opportunity of praying; there no intercessor, no friend, no father shall assist." To whom shall the sinner then have recourse? Is it to God, whom he has so much despised? "Who," says St. Basil, "shall deliver you? Is it that God whom you have insulted?" — St. Basil, Orat. iv. de Pœnit. Perhaps he may have recourse to the saints, or to Mary? No; for then "*the stars*" — that is, his holy advocates — "*shall fall from heaven, and the moon*" — which represents Mary — "*shall not give her light.*" — Matt. xxiv. 29. "Mary," says St. Augustine, "will fly from the gate of heaven." — Serm. iii. ad Fratres.

O God! with what indifference, exclaims St. Thomas of Villanova, do we listen to persons speaking on judgment! We appear to feel as little as if the sentence of condemnation could not fall upon ourselves, or as if we were not to be judged. "Heu quam securi hæc dicimus et audimus, quasi non tangeret hæc sententia, aut quasi dies ille nunquam esset venturus." — Conc. i. de Judic. And is it not, says the same saint, great folly to entertain security in so perilous an affair? "Quæ est ista stulta securitas in discrimine tanto?" My brother, St. Augustine admonishes you not to say, Will God really send me to hell? "Nunquid Deus vere damnaturus est?" "Say it not," says the holy doctor; "for even the Jews did not persuade themselves that they should be exterminated. So many of the damned did not believe that they should be cast into hell, but afterwards the final vengeance came upon them. 'An end is come, the end is come. . . . . Now I will accomplish my anger in thee, and will judge thee.'" — Ez vii. 6, 8

And thus, as St. Augustine says, the same shall also happen to you. "The day of judgment shall come, and you shall find the threats of God verified." At present it depends on us to choose whatever sentence we please. It is in our power, says St. Eligius, to determine the character of the sentence which we shall receive. "In potestate nostra datur qualiter judicemur." What, then, must we do? We must adjust our accounts before judgment. "Before judgment, prepare thee justice." — Eccl. xviii. 19. St. Bonaventure says that, to escape the danger of failing in business, prudent merchants frequently review and settle their accounts. Let us then say with St. Bernard, "Volo judicatus præsentari, non judicandus." O my Judge, I wish to be judged and punished during life, which is a time of mercy and pardon; for after death shall be the time of justice.

Affections and Prayers.

My God, if I do not appease thee now, there shall then be no more time for turning away thy anger. But how shall I, who have so often despised thy friendship for miserable, beastly pleasures, be able to appease thy wrath? I have repaid with ingratitude thy immense love. How can a creature ever make sufficient satisfaction for having offended the Creator? Ah, my Lord, I thank thee for giving me, in thy mercy, a means of appeasing thine anger and satisfying thy justice. I offer thee the blood and the death of Jesus Christ, thy Son; and behold! I see a superabundant atonement and satisfaction made to thee. To appease thy anger, my repentance is also necessary. Yes, my God, I repent with my whole heart of all the injuries I have done thee. Judge me now, O my Redeemer. I

detest above all things all the offences I have offered to thee. I love thee with my whole heart and above all things, and I purpose to love thee always, and to die rather than ever offend thee again. Thou hast promised to pardon all who repent. Ah! judge me now, and absolve me from my sins. I accept the punishment which I deserve; but reinstate me in thy grace, and preserve me in it till death. Such my hope. O Mary, my mother, I thank thee for all the mercies which thou hast obtained for me. Ah! continue to protect me to the end.

TWENTY-FIFTH CONSIDERATION.

ON THE GENERAL JUDGMENT.

"The Lord shall be known when he executeth judgment." — Ps. ix. 17.

FIRST POINT.

At present, there is no one in this world more despised than Jesus Christ. There is more respect shown to a peasant than to the Lord; for we are afraid to insult a peasant, or provoke him to anger, lest he should seek revenge. But insults are offered to God, and are repeated as wantonly as if he could not avenge them whenever he pleases. "The wicked," says Job, "looked upon the Almighty as if he could do nothing." — Job xxii. 17. Therefore the Redeemer has appointed a day of general judgment, and which is called, in the Scripture, *the day of the Lord*, on which Jesus Christ will make known the greatness of his majesty. "The Lord

shall be known when he executeth judgment." — Ps. ix. 17. Hence that day is called, not a day of mercy and pardon, but "a day of wrath, a day of tribulation and distress, a day of calamity and misery." — Soph. i. 15. Yes; for then the Lord shall come to repair the honor which sinners have sought to take from him on this earth. Let us examine the circumstances of the judgment of this great day.

The coming of the Judge shall be preceded by fire. "A fire shall go before him." — Ps. xcvi. 3. Fire shall descend from heaven, and shall burn the earth and all things upon the earth. "The earth, and the works which are in it, shall be burnt up." —2 Pet. iii. 10. Thus palaces, churches, villas, cities, kingdoms, all must be reduced to one heap of ashes. This house, defiled by sins, must be purified by fire. Behold the end of all the riches, pomps, and pleasures of this earth! After the death of all men, "the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall rise again." — 1 Cor. xv. 52. "As often," says Jerome, "as I consider the day of judgment, I tremble; that trumpet appears always to sound in my ears, '*Arise, ye dead, and come to judgment.*'" — In Matt. cap. v. At the sound of this trumpet, the souls of the just shall descend to be united to the bodies with which they served God in this life; and the unhappy souls of the damned shall come up from hell to take possession of the accursed bodies with which they offended God.

O, how great shall be the difference between the bodies of the just and the bodies of the damned! The just shall appear whiter, more beautiful, and more resplendent than the sun. "Then the just shall shine as the sun." — Matt. xiii. 43. Happy he who knows how to mortify his flesh in his life by

refusing it forbidden pleasures; and who, to keep it under greater check, imitates the saints, by denying it even lawful gratifications, and by treating it with severity and contempt. O, how great shall then be the happiness of those who shall have practised mortification of the flesh! We may estimate it from the words which St. Peter of Alcantara addressed after death to St. Teresa. "O happy penance, which merited for me such great glory!" But, on the other hand, the bodies of the reprobate shall appear black and hideous, and shall send forth an intolerable stench. O, how great the pain of the damned in taking possession of their bodies! "Accursed body!" the soul shall say; "to indulge you, I have brought myself to perdition." And the body shall say, "Accursed soul! why have you, who had the use of reason, allowed me the pleasures which have merited for you and me the eternal torments of hell?"

Affections and Prayers.

Ah, my Jesus and my Redeemer, who shall be one day my Judge, pardon me before that day arrives. "Turn not away thy face from me." — Ps. xxvi. 9. Thou art now a Father to me; and, like a father, receive into thy friendship a son who casts himself with sorrow at thy feet. My Father, I ask pardon. I have offended thee; I have unjustly forsaken thee. Thou didst not deserve such treatment from me. I repent of it; I am sorry for it with my whole heart "*Turn not away thy face from me;*" do not cast me off, as I deserved. Remember the blood which thou hast shed for me, and have pity on me. My Jesus, I wish for no other judge than thee. "I willingly," said St. Thomas of Villanova, "submit to the judgment of him who died for me, and who,

that he might not condemn me, has condemned himself to the cross." St. Paul has said the same. "Who is he that shall condemn? Christ Jesus, that died." — Rom. viii. 34. My Father, I love thee, and, for the future, I will never more depart from thy feet. Forget the injuries I have done thee, and give me a great love for thy goodness. I desire to love thee more than I have offended thee; but, if thou dost not assist me, I shall not be able to love thee. Assist me, O my Jesus; make me always grateful to thy love, that, on the day of judgment, I may be found in the valley of Josaphat, among the number of thy lovers. O Mary, my queen and my advocate, assist me now; for if I am lost, thou shalt nōt be able to help me on that day. Thou prayest for all; pray also for one who glories in being thy devoted servant, and who places so much confidence in thee.

SECOND POINT.

After their resurrection, all men shall be told by the angels to go to the valley of Josaphat, that there they may be judged. "Nations, nations, in the valley of destruction; for the day of the Lord is near." — Joel iii. 14. When the whole human race shall be assembled, the angels shall come and separate the reprobate from the elect. "The angels shall go out, and shall separate the wicked from among the just." — Matt. xiii. 49. The just shall stand on the right, and the wicked shall be driven to the left. How great the pain which you should feel at being driven away from a party of pleasure, or at being expelled from the church! But how much greater shall be the pain of those who shall be banished from the society of the saints! "What think you," says the author of the Imperfect Work,

" must be the confusion of the wicked, when, after being separated from the just, they shall be abandoned?" — Hom. liv. This confusion alone would, according to St. Chrysostom, be sufficient to constitute a hell for the reprobate. " Et si nihil ulterius paterentur, ista sola verecundia sufficeret eis ad pœnam." — In Matt. cap. xxiv. The son shall be separated from the father, the husband from the wife, and the master from the servant. " One shall be taken, and one shall be left." — Matt. xxiv. 40. Tell me, my brother, what place do you think shall fall to you? Would you wish to be found at the right hand? If you do, abandon the life which leads to the left.

In this life, the princes of the earth and the worldly rich are considered fortunate, but the saints, who live in poverty and humiliations, are despised. O faithful souls, who love God, be not troubled at seeing yourselves in contempt and tribulations on this earth. " Your sorrow shall be turned into joy." — John xvi. 20. On the day of judgment you shall be called truly fortunate, and shall have the honor of being declared to belong to the court of Jesus Christ. O, how beautiful shall then be the appearance of St. Peter of Alcantara, who was despised as an apostate! of St. John of God, who was treated as a fool! of St. Peter Celestine, who, after having renounced the popedom, died in a prison! O, how great shall then be the honors of so many martyrs who have been torn in pieces by their executioners! " Then shall every man have praise from God." — 1 Cor. iv. 5. But, on the other hand, how horrible shall be the appearance of Herod, of Pilate, of Nero, and of so many other great men of this earth who are now damned! O lovers of the world, in the valley, in the valley I expect you. There, without

doubt, you shall change your sentiments; there you shall weep over your folly. Miserable beings, who, for the sake of making a figure for a short time on the theatre of this world, shall afterwards have to act the part of reprobates in the tragedy of judgment! The elect shall then be placed on the right; according to the apostle, they shall, for their greater glory, be raised in the air above the clouds, and shall go with the angels to meet Jesus Christ descending from heaven. "We shall be taken up together with them to meet Christ into the air." — 1 Thess. iv. 16. But the damned, like so many goats destined for the slaughter, shall be compelled to remain at the left, waiting for the Judge, who shall publicly pronounce sentence of condemnation against all his enemies.

But, behold! the heavens are already opened; the angels come to assist at the judgment, carrying the symbols of the passion of Jesus Christ. "When," says St. Thomas, "the Lord comes to judgment, the sign of the cross and the other emblems of his passion shall be exhibited." — Opus ii. c. ccxliv. The cross especially shall appear. "And then," says the Redeemer, "shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven, and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn." — Matt. xxiv. 30. O, says Cornelius a Lapide, how great, at the sight of the cross, shall be the wailing of sinners who, during life, disregarded their own salvation, which the Son of God purchased at so dear a price! "Plangent qui salutem suam quæ Christo tam caro stetit, neglexerint." "Then," says St. Chrysostom, "shall the nails complain of thee; the wounds, the cross of Christ, shall speak against thee." "Clavi de te conquerentur, cicatrices contra te loquentur, crux Christi contra te perorabit." — Hom. xx. in

Matt. The holy apostles and all their imitators shall assist as assessors at the general judgment, and shall, together with Jesus Christ, judge the nations. "The just shall shine. . . . They shall judge nations" — Wis. iii. 7, 8. Most holy Mary, the queen of angels and saints, shall also come to assist at the judgment. Lastly, the eternal Judge shall come seated on a throne of majesty and light. "And they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with much power and majesty." — Matt. xxiv. 30. "At their presence," says the prophet Joel, "the people shall be in grievous pains." — Joel ii. 6. The sight of Jesus Christ shall console the elect; but in the reprobate it shall excite more pain than hell itself. "It would," says St. Jerome, "be easier to bear the pains of hell than the presence of the Lord." St. Teresa used to say, "My Jesus, afflict me with every pain, but do not allow me to see your countenance enraged against me on that day." And St. Basil says, "This confusion surpasses all torture." Then shall be verified the prediction of St. John, that the damned shall call upon the mountains to fall upon them, and to hide them from the sight of an angry Judge. "And they shall say to the mountains and rocks, Fall upon us, and hide us from the face of Him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb." — Apoc. vi. 16.

Affections and Prayers.

O my dear Redeemer, O Lamb of God, who hast come into the world, not to punish, but to pardon sins, ah, pardon me immediately; pardon me before the arrival of that day on which thou shalt judge me. Then the sight of thee, O divine Lamb, who hast borne with me so long and with so much

patience, should, if I were lost, be the hell of my hell. Ah! I say again, pardon me soon; draw me by thy merciful hand from the abyss into which my sins have cast me. I repent, O Sovereign Good, of having offended thee, and of having offended thee so grievously. I love thee, my Judge, who hast loved me so tenderly. Ah! through the merits of thy death, grant me a great grace, which shall transform me from a sinner into a saint. Thou hast promised to hear all who pray to thee. "Cry to me, and I will hear thee." — Jer. xxxiii. 3. I do not ask earthly goods; I ask thy grace, thy love, and nothing else. Hear me, O my Jesus, through the love which thou didst bear to me when thou diedst on the cross for my salvation. My beloved Judge, I am a criminal, but a criminal who loves thee more than he loves himself. Have pity on me. Mary, my mother, come to my aid, and come immediately; now is the time that thou canst assist me. Thou didst not abandon me when I lived in forgetfulness of thee and of God; come to my relief now that I am resolved to serve thee always, and never more to offend my Lord. O Mary, after Jesus, thou art my hope.

THIRD POINT.

But, behold! the judgment commences. The books, which shall be the consciences of each individual, are opened. "The judgment sat, and the books were opened." — Dan. vii. 10. The witnesses against the reprobate shall be, first, the devils, who, according to St. Augustine, shall say, "Most just God, declare him to be mine who was unwilling to be yours." Secondly, they shall be their own consciences, "their own conscience

bearing witness to them." — Rom. ii. 15. The very walls of the house in which they have offended God shall bear testimony, and shall cry for vengeance against them. "The stone shall cry out of the wall." — Hab. ii. 11. Finally, the Judge himself, who has been present at all the insults offered to him, shall give evidence against the sinner. "I am the Judge and the Witness, saith the Lord." — Jer. xxix. 23. St. Paul says, that then the Lord "will bring to light the hidden things of darkness." — 1 Cor. iv. 5. He will make known to all men the most secret and shameful sins in the reprobate, which they concealed even in the tribunal of confession. "I will discover thy shame to thy face." — Nahum iii. 5. The Master of the Sentences, along with other authors, is of opinion that the sins of the elect shall not be manifested; but shall, according to the words of David, be covered. "Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered." — Ps. xxxi. 1. But St. Basil teaches, that with a single glance all shall see, as in a picture, the sins of the damned. "Unico intuitu singula peccata velut in pictura noscentur." — Lib. i. de Ver. Virg. If, says St. Thomas, (Opus lx.) in the garden of Gethsemani, at the words of Christ, "*I am he*," the soldiers who came to take him prisoner fell prostrate on the ground, what shall be the condition of the damned, when, sitting in judgment, he shall say to them, "Behold, I am he whom you have so much despised"?

But now the sentence comes on. Jesus Christ shall first turn to the elect, and address them in these consoling words: "Come, ye blessed of my Father, possess the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." — Matt. xxv 34

So great was the consolation which St. Francis of Assisium felt when he learned by revelation that he was predestined, that he could not contain himself. How great shall be the joy of the elect in hearing the Judge say to them, "Come, blessed children, come to a kingdom; for you there are no more pains, no more fears; you are, and shall be, saved forever. I bless the blood which I have shed for you, and I bless the tears which you have shed for your sins. Let us ascend into paradise, where we shall remain together for all eternity!" Most holy Mary will also bless her servants, and will invite them with her to heaven. And thus, singing alleluias, the elect shall enter paradise in triumph, to possess, to praise, and to love God forever.

But on the other hand, the reprobate, turning to Jesus Christ, shall say to him, "What shall become of us?" Since, the Judge will say, you have renounced and despised my grace, "depart from me, you cursed, into everlasting fire."—Matt. xxv. 41. *Depart;* begone from me; I wish neither to see nor to hear you evermore. *You cursed*, go, and since you have despised my blessing, go accursed. And where, O Lord, shall they go? *Into fire*, into hell, to burn both in soul and body. And for how many years, or for how many ages? *Into everlasting fire;* for all eternity; as long as God shall be God. After this sentence, says St. Ephrem, the reprobate shall take leave of the angels, of the saints, of relatives, and of the divine mother. "Farewell, ye just! farewell, O cross! farewell, O paradise! farewell, fathers and children, for we shall never see any of you again! farewell, O Mary, mother of God!"—S. Ephr. de Variis, torm., inf. Then, in the middle of that valley, a pit shall be opened, into which the devils and the damned shall

fall. O God! they shall see those gates closed, never to be opened, never, never for all eternity. O accursed sin, to what a melancholy end shall you one day lead so many poor souls! O unhappy souls, whom this unhappy lot awaits!

Affections and Prayers.

Ah, my Savior and my God! what sentence shall I receive on that day? If, O my Jesus, thou didst now demand an account of my life, what could I say to thee but that I deserved a thousand hells? Yes, it is true, O my divine Redeemer, I deserve a thousand hells; but remember that I love thee, and that I love thee more than myself; and for the insults I have committed against thee I feel so great a sorrow, that I would be content to have suffered every evil rather than have offended thee. Thou, O my Jesus, condemnest obstinate sinners, but not those who repent and wish to love thee. Behold me penitent at thy feet; make me feel that thou pardonest me. But this thou hast declared by the mouth of thy prophet: "Turn ye to me, saith the Lord of Hosts, and I will turn to you." — Zac. i. 3. I give up all things; I renounce all the pleasures and goods of this world; I turn to thee, and embrace thee, O my beloved Redeemer. Ah, receive me into thy heart, and there inflame me with thy holy love; but inflame me in such a manner that I shall never again think of separating from thee. O my Jesus, save me, and let my salvation consist in loving thee always, and in singing thy mercies forever. "The mercies of the Lord I will sing forever." Mary, my hope, my refuge, and my mother, assist me, and obtain for me holy perseverance. No one has been lost who has had recourse to thee. To thee I recommend myself; have pity on me.

TWENTY-SIXTH CONSIDERATION.

ON THE PAINS OF HELL.

"And these shall go into everlasting punishment."—Matt. xxv. 46.

FIRST POINT.

In committing sin, the sinner does two evils. He abandons God, the Sovereign Good, and turns to creatures. "For my people have done two evils. They have forsaken me, the fountain of living water, and have digged to themselves cisterns — broken cisterns — that can hold no water." — Jer. ii. 13. Since, then, by turning to creatures the sinner offends God, he shall be justly tortured in hell by the same creatures, by fire, and by devils: in this punishment consists the pain of sense. But because his greatest guilt and the malice of his sin consist in turning his back on God, his principal torment, his hell, shall be the pain of loss, or the pain arising from having lost God.

Let us first consider the pain of sense. It is of faith, that there is a hell. In the middle of the earth there is a prison reserved for the chastisement of rebels against God. What is this hell? It is what the glutton, who was damned, called it — a "place of torments." — Luke xvi. 28. A place of torments, where all the senses and powers of the damned shall have their proper torment, and where, the more a person shall have offended God by any sense, the more he shall be tortured in that sense "By what things a man sinneth, by the same also he is tormented." — Wis. xi. 17. "As much as

she hath glorified herself and lived in delicacies, so much torments and sorrow give ye to her." — Apoc. xviii. 7. The sight shall be tormented with darkness. "A land," says Job, "that is dark, and covered with the mist of death." — Job x. 21. How pitiable the condition of a man who is shut up in a dark cave for forty or fifty years, or during his whole life! Hell is a dungeon closed up on every side, into which a ray of the sun, or of any other light, shall never enter. "He shall never see the light." — Ps. xlviii. 20. The fire of this world sends forth light; but the fire of hell is utterly dark. "The voice of the Lord divided the fire." — Ps. xxviii. 7. In explaining these words, St. Basil says, that the Lord shall separate the light from the fire, so that this fire shall burn, but shall not illuminate. Albertus Magnus expounds them more briefly, and says that God "will divide the flame from the heat." The very smoke that shall issue from that fire shall form a storm of darkness which, according to St. Jude, shall blind the damned. "To whom the storm of darkness is reserved forever." — St. Jude 13. St. Thomas teaches, that the damned have only the light which serves to increase their torments. "Quantum sufficit ad videndum ea quæ torquere possunt." — 3 part. qu. 97, art. 5. In that glimmering light they shall see the deformity of their associates, and of the devils, who shall assume horrible forms in order to increase the terrors of the damned.

The smell also shall be tormented. How painful to be confined in a close room along with a putrid corpse! "Out of their carcasses," says the prophet Isaias, "shall rise a stink." — Is. xxxiv. 3. The damned Christian must remain in the midst of so many millions of the reprobate, who, though for-

ever alive to pain, are called carcasses on account of the stench which they send forth. St. Bonaventure says, that if the body of one of the damned were placed on this earth, it would, by its stench, be sufficient to cause the death of all men. Miserable fools! the greater the number of the damned in hell, the more insufferable shall be their torments. "There," says St. Thomas, "the society of the reprobate shall cause, not a diminution, but an increase of misery." — Suppl. qu. 86, art. 1. Their sufferings are more intolerable on account of the stench, on account of the shrieks of the damned, and on account of the narrowness of the place. In hell they shall be one over the other, like sheep gathered together in the winter. "They are," said David, "laid in hell like sheep." — Ps. xlviii. 15. They shall be even like grapes pressed under the wine-press of God's wrath. "And he treadeth the wine-press of the fierceness of the wrath of God the Almighty." — Apoc. xix. 15. From this shall arise the pain of immobility. "Let them become immovable as a stone." — Exod. xv. 16. Thus, in whatsoever position the damned shall fall into hell after the last day, in that they must remain, without ever changing their posture, and without being ever able to move hand or foot, as long as God shall be God.

The hearing shall be tormented by the unceasing howling and wailing of those miserable beings, who are sunk in an abyss of despair. The devils shall torment the damned by continual noises. "The sound of dread is always in his ears." — Job xv. 21. How painful to a person longing for sleep to hear the groans of a sick man, the barking of a dog, or the screams of an infant! But, O, how miserable the condition of the damned, who must

listen incessantly for all eternity to the clamor and cries of the companions of their torments! The damned shall be tormented by a ravenous hunger "They shall suffer hunger like dogs." — Ps. lviii 15. But they never shall have a morsel of bread. Their thirst shall be so great that all the waters of the ocean should not be able to quench it; but they shall never be allowed a single drop. The rich glutton asked for a drop of water; but he has not yet got it, and he never, never shall have it.

Affections and Prayers.

Ah! my Lord, behold at thy feet one who has so much despised thy grace and thy chastisements! Miserable should I be, O my Jesus, if thou hadst not taken pity on me. How many years should I be in that fetid furnace, in which so many of my companions are now burning! Ah! my Redeemer, why does not this thought make me burn with thy love? How can I ever again think of offending thee? Ah! my Jesus, may I never more displease thee. Strike me dead a thousand times rather than permit me ever again to insult thee. Since thou hast begun, complete the work. Thou hast taken me out of the abyss of so many sins, and hast so lovingly called me to love thee. Ah! grant that I may spend for thee all the time which thou now givest me. How ardently should the damned desire a day or an hour of the time granted to me! And shall I continue to spend it in offending thee? No, my Jesus; through the merits of that blood, which has hitherto delivered me from hell, do not permit it. I love thee, O Sovereign Good, and because I love thee, I am sorry for having offended thee. I wish never more to offend thee, but to love thee forever. Mary, my queen and my mother, pray to

Jesus for me, and obtain for me the gift of perseverance and of his holy love.

SECOND POINT.

The pain which most severely torments the senses of the damned arises from the fire of hell, which tortures the sense of touch. "The vengeance on the flesh of the ungodly is fire and worms." — Eccl. vii. 19. Hence, in passing sentence, the Lord makes special mention of it. "Depart from me, you cursed, into everlasting fire." — Matt. xxv. 41. Even in this life, the pain of fire is the greatest of all torments; but according to St. Augustine, our fire, compared with the fire of hell, is but painted fire. "In cujus comparatione noster hic ignis depictus est." St. Vincent Ferrer says that, in comparison with the fire of hell, our fire is cold. The reason is, that the fire of this earth has been created for our use; but God has made the fire of hell purposely to torment the damned. "Longe alius," says Tertullian, "est ignis qui usui humano, alius qui Dei justitiæ deservit." The wrath of God lights up this avenging fire. "A fire is kindled in my rage." — Jer. xv. 14. Hence the prophet Isaias calls the fire of hell the spirit of heat. "If the Lord shall wash away the filth of the daughters of Sion . . . . by the spirit of burning." — Isa. iv. 4. The damned shall be sent, not to the fire, but into fire. "Depart from me, you cursed, into everlasting fire." Thus, like a piece of wood in a furnace, they shall be surrounded by fire. They shall have an abyss of fire below, an abyss of fire above, and an abyss of fire on every side. If they touch, or see, or breathe, they touch, and see, and breathe nothing but fire. They shall live in fire, like a fish

in water. But this fire shall not only surround the damned, but shall also enter into their very bowels, to torment them. Their bodies shall become all fire. Thus this fire shall burn the bowels, the heart, the brain, the blood within the veins, and even the marrow within the bones. Each of the damned shall be in himself a furnace of fire. "Thou shalt make them as a furnace of fire." — Ps. xx. 10.

Some cannot bear to walk under a strong sun, or to remain in a close room before a large fire; they cannot endure a spark that flies from a candle; and still they fear not the devouring flames of hell. "Which of you," says the prophet Isaias, "can dwell with devouring fire?" — Isa. xxxiii. 14. As a wild beast devours a lamb, so the fire of hell devours the damned; but it devours them without ever causing death. "Fools," says St. Peter Damian, addressing the unchaste, "continue, continue to indulge your flesh; a day shall come when your impurities, like pitch, shall nourish and increase within your bowels the flame which shall torment you in hell." "Venit dies imo nox, quando libido tua vertetur in picem, qua se nutriet perpetuus ignis in tuis visceribus." — Epist. vi. St. Jerome says that this fire shall bring with it all the pains and torments to which men are subject on this earth — pains in the sides, in the head, in the bowels, in the nerves. "In uno igne omnia supplicia sentiunt in inferno peccatores." — Epist. ad Pam. In this fire the damned shall suffer even the pain of cold. "Let him," says Job, "pass from the snow waters to excessive heat." — Job xxiv. 19. But we must always keep in mind, that all the torments of this earth are, as St. Chrysostom says, but the shadow of the pains of hell. "Pone ignem, pone ferrum, quid nisi umbra ad illa tormenta."

The powers of the soul also shall have their proper torment. The damned shall be tormented in the memory by the remembrance of the time which was given to them, in this life, that they might save their souls, and which they spent in procuring their own damnation; by the remembrance of the graces which they have received from God, and of which they have not profited. They shall be tormented in the understanding by thinking of the great good which they have lost in losing heaven and God, and that this loss is forever irreparable; in the will, by seeing that they shall be refused whatsoever they ask. "The desire of the wicked shall perish."—Ps. cxi. 10. The miserable beings shall never have any thing which they desire, and shall be forever afflicted with the eternal torments which they abhor. They would wish to be rid of these torments, and to enjoy peace; but in these torments they shall forever remain, and peace they shall never find.

Affections and Prayers.

Ah, my Jesus, thy blood and thy death are my hope. Thou hast died to deliver me from eternal death. Ah, Lord, who has partaken more of thy merits than I, who have so often deserved hell? Ah! do not allow me to live any longer ungrateful to the great graces thou hast bestowed upon me. Thou hast delivered me from the fire of hell, because thou dost wish me to burn, not in that tormenting fire, but with the sweet flames of thy love. Assist me, then, that I may satisfy thy desire. Were I now in hell, I could never more love thee. But since I am able to love thee, I wish to love thee. I love thee, O infinite Goodness. I love thee, O my Redeemer, who hast

loved me so tenderly. How have I been able to live so long in forgetfulness of thee? I thank thee for not having been forgetful of me. Hadst thou forgotten me, I should now either be in hell, or without sorrow for my sins. This sorrow, which I feel in my heart for having offended thee, and my desire to love thee ardently, are gifts of thy grace, which still assist me. I thank thee for them, O my Jesus. I hope for the future to give thee the remainder of my life. I wish to think only of serving and pleasing thee. Remind me always of the hell I have deserved, and of the graces thou hast bestowed upon me, and do not permit me ever again to turn my back upon thee, and to condemn myself to that pit of torments. O mother of God, pray for me, a sinner. Thy intercession has delivered me from hell. Deliver me also, O my mother, by thy prayers, from sin, which alone can again condemn me to hell.

THIRD POINT.

But all these torments are nothing, compared with the pain of loss. Hell does not consist in the darkness, stench, shrieks, and fire; the pain which constitutes hell is the pain of having lost God. "Let torments," says St. Bruno, "be added to torments, and let them not be deprived of God." —Serm. de Jud. Fin. And St. John Chrysostom says that a thousand hells are not equal to this pain. "Si mille dixeris gehennas, nihil par dices illius doloris." —Hom. xlix. ad Pop. According to St. Augustine, if the damned enjoy the vision of God, they should feel no pain, and hell should be converted into a paradise." —Tom. ix. de trip. hab. To conceive some notion of this pain,

consider that, should a person lose a jewel worth a hundred crowns, the loss would occasion great pain; but, were the jewel worth two hundred crowns, his pain is doubled; and, if it were worth four hundred crowns, the pain is still greater. In a word, the pain which he suffers is in proportion to the value of what he has lost. What has a damned soul lost? She has lost God, who is an infinite good. Hence St. Thomas says, that her pain is, in a certain manner, infinite. "Pœna damnati est infinita, quia est amissio boni infiniti." —1, 2, qu. 87, art. 4.

This pain is dreaded only by the saints. "Hæc amantibus," says St. Augustine, "non contemnentibus pœna est." St. Ignatius of Loyola used to say, "Lord, I am willing to bear every pain, but not the pain of being deprived of thee." But, because they live in the midst of darkness, sinners who are content to live for months and years without God, do not understand this pain. However, they shall know at death the great good which they lose. At her departure from this world, the soul, as St. Antonine says, instantly sees that she has been created for God. "Separata autem anima a corpore intelligit Deum summum bonum, et ad illud esse creatam." Hence she shall suddenly rush forward to embrace her Sovereign Good; but, if she be in sin, God shall cast her off. If a dog see a hare, what efforts does he not make to break his chains and seize his prey! At her separation from the body, the soul is naturally drawn to God; but sin drags her away, and sends her to hell, at a distance from him. "Your iniquities," says the prophet Isaias, "have divided between you and your God." —Isa. lix. 2. The entire, then, of the hell of the damned consists in that first word of the

sentence of their condemnation, — "*Depart from me, you cursed.*" Go, Jesus Christ shall say: I do not wish you ever again to see my face. "Si mille quis ponat gehennas," says Chrysostom, "nihil tale dicturus est, quale est exosum Christo." — Chrys. Hom. xxiv. in Matt. When Absalom heard that David condemned him never more to appear before him, he said, "Tell my father either to permit me to see his face, or to put me to death." — 2 Kings xiv. 24. To one of his grandees, whom he saw guilty of irreverence in the church, Philip the Second said, "Do not dare ever again to appear in my presence." So great was the pain which the nobleman felt, that, after having returned home, he died of grief. What shall be the anguish of the reprobate at the hour of death, when God shall say to him, "Begone; I will never see you again!" "I will hide my face from them: . . . . all evils and afflictions shall find them." — Deut. xxxi. 17. On the day of judgment Jesus Christ shall say to the reprobate, "You are no longer mine; I am no longer yours." "Call his name not, my people; for you are not my people, and I will not be yours." Osee i. 9.

With what pain does a son at the death of a father, or a spouse at the death of her husband, say, "My father, my spouse, I shall never see you again"! Ah! if we now heard the wailing of one of the damned, and asked him why he weeps so bitterly, his answer should be, "I weep because I have lost God, and shall never see him more." Perhaps the miserable man can love God in hell, and can resign himself to his will? No; if he could do this, hell should not be hell. The unhappy being can never resign himself to the divine will. Neither can he love his God; he hates and shall

hate him forever; and his hell shall consist in the conviction that God is an infinite good, and that he is compelled to hate him, while he sees that he is worthy of infinite love. When St. Catharine asked a devil who he was, he said, "I am that wicked wretch that is deprived of the love of God." The damned shall hate and curse God; and in cursing God, they shall also curse the benefits he has conferred upon them; they shall curse the benefits of creation, of redemption, of the sacraments, particularly the sacraments of baptism and penance, and, above all, the most holy sacrament of the altar. They shall hate all the angels and saints, but especially their angel-guardians and their holy advocates, and, above all, the divine mother. But they shall principally hate the Three Divine Persons, and among them they shall hate in a special manner the Son of God, who once died for their salvation; they shall curse his wounds, his blood, his pains, and his death.

Affections and Prayers.

Ah, my God, thou then art my supreme and infinite Good; and I have so often voluntarily lost thee. I knew that in committing sin I gave thee great displeasure, and that I lost thy grace; and with this knowledge I have consented to sin! Ah, if I did not see thee, O Son of God, nailed to the cross in order to die for me, I should not have courage to ask or hope for pardon from thee. Eternal Father, look not on me, but behold thy beloved Son, who asks mercy for me; hear him, and pardon me. I ought at this moment to be in hell, without any hope of being evermore able to love thee, or to recover thy lost grace. My God, I am sorry above all things for the injury I have done

thee in renouncing thy friendship, and despising thy love for the miserable pleasures of this world O that I had died a thousand times, rather than have offered thee so great an insult! How could I have been so blind and foolish? I thank thee, O my Lord, for giving me time to repair the evil I have done. Since, through thy mercy, I am not in hell, and can love thee, O my God, I wish to love thee. I will wait no longer to convert myself entirely to thee. I love thee, O infinite Goodness. I love thee, my life, my treasure, my love, my all. Remind me always, O Lord, of the love which thou hast borne to me, and of the hell which I have deserved, that this thought may continually excite me to make acts of love, and to say always, *I love thee, I love thee, I love thee.* O Mary, my queen, my hope, and my mother, if I were in hell, I could never more love thee. I love thee, O my mother, and in thee, after Jesus, I trust that I shall never again cease to love my God and thee. Assist me; pray to Jesus for me.

TWENTY-SEVENTH CONSIDERATION.

ON THE ETERNITY OF HELL.

"And these shall go into everlasting punishment."—Matt. xxv. 46.

FIRST POINT.

WERE hell not eternal, it should not be hell. Torments which continue but a short time, are not a severe punishment. The man who is af-

flicted with an imposthume or cancer, submits to the knife or the cautery. The pain is very sharp; but, because it is soon over, the torture is not very great. But, should the incision or cauterization last for a week, or for an entire month, how frightful should be his agony! A slight pain in the eye, or in the teeth, when it lasts for a long time, becomes insupportable. Even a comedy, a musical entertainment, should it continue for an entire day, produces intolerable tediousness. And should it last for a month, or for a year, who could bear it? What then must hell be, where the damned are compelled, not to listen to the same comedy or the same music, nor to submit merely to pains in the eyes or in the teeth, or to the torture of the knife, or of the red-hot iron, but to suffer all pains and all torments? And for how long? For all eternity. "They shall be tortured forever and ever." — Apoc. xx. 10.

This eternity is of faith; it is not an opinion, but a truth attested by God in so many places in the Holy Scriptures. "Depart from me, you accursed, into everlasting fire." — Matt. xxv. 41. "And these shall go into everlasting punishment." — ver. 46. "Who shall suffer eternal punishment in destruction." — 2 Thess. i. 9. "Every one shall be salted with fire." — Mark ix. 48. As salt prevents putrefaction, so the fire of hell, while it tortures the damned, performs the office of salt by preserving their life. "Ignis ibi consumit," says St. Bernard, "ut semper servet." — Medit., c. iii.

Now, how great should be the folly of the man who, for the sake of a day's amusement, would voluntarily condemn himself to be shut up in a dungeon for twenty or thirty years! If hell lasted but a hundred, or even but two or three years, it would

be the extreme of folly in a Christian to condemn himself to fire for two or three years for the vile pleasure of a moment. But there is not a question of thirty, of a hundred, of a thousand, or of a hundred thousand years; but there is question of eternity; there is question of suffering forever the same torments—torments which shall never end, and shall never be mitigated in the slightest degree. The saints, then, had reason, as long as they were on this earth, and in danger of being lost, to weep and tremble. Blessed Isaias, even while he lived in the desert in fasting and penitential rigors, wept, and said, "Ah, unhappy me, who am not as yet free from the danger of losing my soul."

Affections and Prayers.

Ah, my God, if thou hadst sent me to hell, as I have often deserved, and hadst afterwards drawn me from it, how deeply should I feel my obligations to thee! What a holy life would I have commenced! And now that thou hast shown me greater mercy by preserving me from falling into that place of woe, what shall I do? Will I again offend thee and provoke thy wrath, that thou mayst send me to burn in that prison of rebels against thy majesty, where so many are buried in fire for fewer sins than I have committed? Ah, my Redeemer! I have hitherto done so; and instead of availing myself of the time which thou gavest me to weep over my sins, I have spent it in provoking thee still more. I thank thy infinite goodness for having borne with me so long. If thy goodness were not infinite, how couldst thou have borne with me? I thank thee for having waited for me till now with so much patience. I thank thee in a most special manner for the light which thou now givest me, by which thou

makest me see my folly, and the injury I have done thee in insulting thee so often by my sins. My Jesus, I detest them, and am sorry for them with my whole heart. Through the merits of thy passion, pardon me, and assist me with thy grace, that I may never more offend thee. I now have just reason to fear that, if I commit another mortal sin, thou wilt abandon me. My Lord, I entreat thee to place this just fear before my eyes whenever the devil shall tempt me to offend thee again. My God, I love thee; I do not wish evermore to lose thee; assist me by thy grace. O most holy Virgin, do thou also assist me. Obtain for me the grace always to have recourse to thee in my temptations, that I may never again lose my God. Mary, after Jesus, thou art my hope.

SECOND POINT.

He that enters hell shall not depart from it for all eternity. This thought made David tremble and say, "Let not the deep swallow me up, and let not the pit shut her mouth upon me." — Ps. lxviii. 16. As soon as the damned fall into that pit of torments, its mouth is closed never to be opened. In hell there is a gate for admission, but none for egress. "There will be a descent," says Eusebius, "but there shall be no ascent." In explaining the words of the Psalmist, this author says, "*And let not the pit shut her mouth;*" because, when it shall have received them, it will be closed above and opened downwards. As long as the sinner remains on this earth, he may hope to reverse the sentence of his damnation; but as soon as death shall overtake him in sin, all his hopes are at an end forever. "When the wicked man is dead, there shall be

no hope any more." — Prov. xi. 7. Perhaps the damned may flatter themselves with a false hope, and thus find some relief in their despair. The man who is mortally wounded, confined to his bed, and given over by his physicians, may console himself with the hope of finding a physician or a remedy to heal his wounds. The man who is condemned to the galleys for life, may also find comfort in the expectation of being one day delivered from his chains. And may not the damned at least say, "Who knows but I shall one day escape from this prison?" and thus delude himself with this false hope? No; in hell there is no hope, whether true or false; there is no *perhaps*. *I will set before thy face.* — Ps. xlix. 21. The unhappy damned shall always see the sentence of their reprobation written before their eyes. In it they shall read, that they shall weep forever in that pit of torments. "And many shall awake; some unto life everlasting, and others unto reproach, to see it always." — Dan. xii. 2. Hence the damned not only suffer the torments of each moment, but in each moment they endure the pain of eternity, saying, "What I now suffer I must suffer forever." "They bear," says Tertullian, "the weight of eternity." "Pondus æternitatis sustinent."

Let us, then, pray to the Lord in the words of St. Augustine, "Here burn, here cut, here spare not, that you may spare for eternity." The chastisements of this life pass away; "thy arrows pass;" but the pains of the next life last forever; "the voice of thy thunder in a wheel." — Ps. lxxvi. 18. Let us dread these punishments. Let us dread that thunder of eternal damnation which shall issue from the mouth of the Judge in passing sentence against the wicked. "Depart from me, you

cursed, into everlasting fire." The Psalmist says, "The voice of thy thunder in a wheel." A wheel is a figure of eternity, which has no end. "I have drawn my sword out of its sheath, not to be turned back." — Ez. xxi. 5. The punishment of hell shall be great; but what ought to terrify us more is, that it shall be irrevocable.

But the unbeliever will say, "Can it be just to punish a sin which lasts but a moment with eternal torments?" But how, I ask, can a sinner, for a momentary pleasure, dare to insult a God of infinite majesty? St. Thomas says (1, 2, qu. 87, art. 3) that, even in human judgments, the punishment of crime is measured, not from its duration, but from its malice. "Non quia homicidium in momento committitur, momentanea pœna punitur." Hell is but a small punishment for mortal sin; an offence against infinite majesty deserves infinite chastisement. "In every mortal sin," says St. Bernardine of Sienna, "an infinite insult is offered to God; but an infinite injury merits infinite punishment." "But, because," says St. Thomas, "a creature is not capable of suffering pain infinite in point of intensity, God inflicts punishment infinite in extension or duration."

Besides, since the damned are incapable of making satisfaction for their sins, their punishment should be necessarily eternal. In this life, penitent sinners can atone for their iniquities only inasmuch as the merits of Jesus Christ are applied to them. But from the application of these merits the reprobate are excluded. Hence, since they can never appease the anger of God, and since their sin is eternal, their punishment also must be eternal. "He shall not give to God his ransom. . . . . And he shall labor forever." — Ps. xlviii. 8, 9. Hence

Belluacensis says, (lib. ii. page 3,) "There sin can be forever punished, and can never be expiated;" for, according to St. Antonine, "There the sinner cannot repent." Therefore the wrath of the Lord shall be always provoked against him. "The people with whom the Lord is angry forever." — Mal. i. 4. Moreover, the damned, though God should wish to pardon them, are unwilling to be pardoned; for their will is obstinate and confirmed in hatred against God. "Non humiliabuntur reprobi," says Innocent the Third, "sed malignitas odii in illis excrescet." — Lib. iii. de Con. Mundi, cap. x. And St. Jerome says, that the reprobate "are insatiable in the desire of sinning." — In Prov. xxvii. Hence, because the damned refuse to be healed, their wounds are incurable. "Why is my wound desperate, so as to refuse to be healed?" — Jer. xv. 18.

Affections and Prayers.

Then, my Redeemer, if at this hour I were damned, as I have deserved, I should be obstinate in hatred against thee, my God, who hast died for me. O God! what a hell should it be to hate thee, who hast loved me so tenderly, who art infinite beauty, infinite goodness, and worthy of infinite love! Then, if I were now in hell, I should be in such an unhappy state, that I would not even wish for the pardon which thou now offerest to me. My Jesus, I thank thee for the mercy thou hast shown me; and since I now can obtain pardon, I wish to love thee. Thou offerest me pardon, and I ask it from thee, and hope for it through thy merits. I am sorry for all the offences I have committed against thee, O infinite Goodness. Pardon me, then. I love thee with my whole soul. Ah, Lord! what evil hast thou done me, that I should have to hate thee for-

ever as my enemy? And what friend have I ever had who has done and suffered so much for me, as thou, O my Jesus, hast done and suffered for me? Ah! do not permit me ever more to fall into enmity with thee, and to lose thy love. Take me out of life, sooner than permit this sovereign evil to befall me. O Mary, take me under thy protection, and do not permit me ever more to rebel against God and against thee.

THIRD POINT.

In this life death is greatly feared by sinners; but in hell it shall be most ardently desired. "Men shall seek death, and shall not find it; and they shall desire to die, and death shall fly from them." — Apoc. ix. 6. Hence St. Jerome has written, "O death, how sweet should you be to those to whom you have been so full of bitterness!" — Ap. S. Bon. Solil. David says that death shall feast on the damned. "Death shall feed upon them." — Ps. xlviii. 15. In explaining this passage, St. Bernardine observes, that as, in feeding, sheep eat the blades of grass, and leave the roots untouched, so death feeds on the damned; it kills them every moment, but leaves them life in order to continue to kill them by pains for all eternity. "Sicut animalia depascunt herbas, sed remanent radices, sic miseri in inferno corrodentur a morte, sed iterum reservabuntur ad pœnas." Thus, according to St. Gregory, the damned die every moment without ever dying. Delivered up to avenging flames, they shall die always. "Flammis ultricibus traditus semper morietur." — Lib. i. Mor. cap. xii. A man who dies through pain is an object of pity to all who behold him. Perhaps the damned, too, expe-

rience commiseration from others? No; they die every moment, and have not, and never shall have, any one to take compassion on them. The emperor Zeno, being one day shut up in a pit, continually cried out, "*For pity's sake, open this grave, and release me.*" But no one heard him, and he was found dead, after having eaten the flesh off his arms. The damned cry out from the pit of hell, says St. Cyril of Alexandria; but no one comes to deliver them, no one feels compassion for them. "Lamentantur et nullus eripit: plangunt et nemo compatitur."

And for how long shall this their misery last? Forever, forever. In the spiritual exercises of Father Paul Segneri, written by Muratori, it is related that, in Rome, a devil in the body of a man possessed, being asked how long he should remain in hell, began to beat his hand against a chair, and answered in a rage, "*Forever, forever.*" At hearing this great sermon of two words, *forever, forever*, many students of the Roman seminary, who were present, made a general confession, and changed their lives. Poor Judas! he has spent more than eighteen hundred years in hell, and his hell is still at its commencement. Poor Cain! he is in fire for more than five thousand eight hundred years, and his hell is at its beginning. Another devil was asked how long it was since he had been sent to hell. He answered, "Yesterday." "How," said the person who asked him, "could it be yesterday, when you are damned for more than five thousand years?" He replied, "O, if you knew what is meant by eternity, you should easily conceive how a thousand years, compared with it, are but a moment. If an angel said to one of the damned, 'You shall leave hell, but only after the lapse of as many

ages as there are drops of water in the ocean, leaves on the trees, or grains of sand in the sea,' he should feel greater joy than a beggar would at hearing of his elevation to a throne. Yes; all these ages shall pass away, they shall be multiplied an infinite number of times, and hell shall be at its commencement. Each of the damned would make this compact with God: Lord, increase my pain as much as you wish; let it last as long as you please; but put an end to it, and I am content. But this end shall never take place. In hell, the trumpet of divine justice shall sound nothing else but these words, *Forever, forever; never, never.*"

The damned shall ask the devils what is the hour of the night. "Watchmen, what of the night?" — Isa. xxi. 11. When shall it end? When shall these trumpets, these shrieks, this stench, these flames, these torments cease? Their answer is, *Never, never.* And how long shall they last? *Forever, forever.* Ah, Lord, give light to so many blind Christians, who, when entreated not to damn themselves, say, "If I go to hell, I must have patience." O God! they have not patience to bear the least cold, to remain in an overheated room, or to submit to a buffet on the cheek. And how can they have patience to remain in a sea of fire, trampled by the devils, and abandoned by God, and by all, for all eternity?

Affections and Prayers.

Ah, Father of mercies, thou dost not abandon him who seeks thee. "Thou hast not forsaken them that seek thee, O Lord." — Ps. ix. 11. I have hitherto turned my back upon thee so often, and thou hast not abandoned me; do not abandon

me now that I seek thee. I repent, O Sovereign Good, of having made so little account of thy grace, which I have exchanged for nothing. Look at the wounds of thy Son; listen to his cries, which implore thee to pardon me; and grant me pardon. O my Redeemer, remind me always of the pains thou hast suffered for me, of the love thou hast borne me, and of my ingratitude, by which I have so often deserved hell, that I may always bewail the injury I have done thee, and that I may live always burning with thy love. Ah, my Jesus, how can I but burn with thy love, when I reflect that for so many years I ought to burn in hell, and continue to burn in it for all eternity; when I remember that thou hast died in order to deliver me from it, and that thou hast with so much mercy rescued me from that land of misery? Were I in hell, I should now hate thee there, and should have to hate thee forever; but now I love thee, and will love thee forever. In thy blood I hope that I now love thee, and that I will love thee forever. Thou lovest me, and I also love thee. Thou wilt love me forever unless I forsake thee. Ah, my Savior, save me from the misfortune of ever leaving thee, and then do with me whatsoever thou pleasest. I merit every punishment, and I accept every chastisement, that thou mayst deliver me from the punishment of being deprived of thy love. O Mary, my refuge, how often have I condemned myself to hell, and thou hast preserved me from it! Ah, deliver me now from sin, which alone can deprive me of the grace of God, and bring me to hell.

TWENTY-EIGHTH CONSIDERATION.

REMORSES OF THE DAMNED.

"Their worm dieth not." — Mark ix. 47.

FIRST POINT.

According to St. Thomas, this worm, which dieth not, is to be understood of remorse of conscience, which shall eternally torment the damned in hell. The remorses which shall gnaw the hearts of the reprobate shall be many; but the most excruciating shall be, first, the thought of the trifles for which they are damned; secondly, the thought of the little which they were required to do in order to save their souls; and thirdly, the thought of the great good which they have lost. After Esau had eaten the pottage of lentils for which he had sold his birthright, the Scripture says that, through sorrow and remorse for the loss, he "roared out with a great cry." — Gen. xxvii. 34. O, how shall the damned howl and roar at the thought of having, for a few momentary, poisoned pleasures, lost an eternal kingdom of delights, and of having condemned themselves forever to a continual death! Hence they shall weep far more bitterly than Jonathan did when he saw himself condemned to death by his father for having eaten a little honey. "I did but taste a little honey, and, behold, I *must die*."—1 Kings xiv. 43. O God! what torture shall each of the damned feel in thinking that he was the cause of his own damnation! At present, our past life appears to us but a dream, a moment. But what shall he who is in hell think

of the fifty or sixty years which he spent on this earth, when he shall be in the abyss of eternity, and, after the lapse of a hundred and a thousand millions of years, shall see that his hell only commences? But were these fifty or sixty years all years of pleasure? Perhaps a sinner living without God always feels happy in his sins. How long do the pleasures of sin last? Only for a few moments. All the remaining hours of the man who lives in enmity with God, are full of pains and bitterness. But what shall these moments of pleasure appear to the unhappy damned? How shall he view that last sin in particular, by which he brought himself to perdition? Then he shall say, "For a miserable, brutal pleasure, which lasted but a moment, and which was scarcely indulged when it vanished like air, I must burn in this fire, in despair and abandoned by all, as long as God shall be God — for all eternity.

Affections and Prayers.

Lord, enlighten me, that I may feel the injustice which I have done thee, and the eternal chastisements I have deserved, by offending thee. My God, I feel a great remorse for having offended thee; but this pain consoles me. Hadst thou sent me to hell, as I deserved, the thought of the trifle for which I was damned should be the hell of my hell. But now, this remorse, I say, consoles me; because it encourages me to hope for pardon from thee, who hast promised to pardon all who repent. Yes, my Lord, I repent of having outraged thee. I embrace this sweet pain of remorse. I even entreat thee to increase it, and to preserve it in my heart till death, that I may always weep bitterly over the offences I have offered to thee. My

Jesus, pardon me. O my Redeemer, who, to procure mercy for me, hadst not mercy on thyself, but didst condemn thyself to die through pain in order to deliver me from hell, have mercy on me. Grant that my remorse for having offended thee may keep me always sorrowful, and, at the same time, inflame my whole soul with love for thee, who hast loved me so tenderly, who hast borne with me so patiently, and who now, instead of chastising me, dost enrich me with thy lights and graces. I thank thee, O my Jesus, and I love thee. I love thee more than myself. I love thee with my whole heart. Thou knowest not how to despise a soul that loves thee. I love thee. Do not banish me from thy face. Receive me, then, into thy friendship, and do not permit me evermore to lose thee. Mary, my mother, accept me for thy servant, and bind me to Jesus, thy Son. Ask him to pardon me, to give me his love and the grace of perseverance till death.

SECOND POINT.

St. Thomas says, that the principal pain of the reprobate shall consist in seeing that they are damned for nothing, and that, if they wished, they could with so much facility acquire for themselves the glory of paradise. "Principaliter dolebunt, quod pro nihilo damnati sunt, et facillime vitam poterant consequi sempiternam." The second remorse of conscience, then, shall arise from the thought of the little that was necessary to be done for the attainment of salvation. A person who was damned, appeared to St. Aumbert, and said to him that the most excruciating pain which he suffered in hell was caused by the thought of the trifles for which he was lost, and of the little which he was

required to do in order to save his soul. The unhappy soul shall then say, "If I mortified myself by not looking at such an object; if I overcame human respect at such a time; if I avoided such an occasion of sin, such a companion, such a conversation, — I should not now be damned. If I had gone to confession every week; if I had frequented the congregation; if I had read every day a spiritual book; if I had recommended myself to Jesus Christ and to Mary, — I should not have relasped into sin. I have so often purposed to do these things, but have either neglected my resolutions, or, after having begun to practise these exercises, I gave them up, and therefore I am lost."

The torture of this remorse shall be increased by the good examples of virtuous friends and companions which the reprobate has witnessed; and still more by the gifts which God had given him for the salvation of his soul; — gifts of nature, such as good health; gifts of fortune, which were so many talents which the Lord had given him that he might make a good use of them, and become a saint; gifts of grace; so many lights, inspirations, calls, and so many years given to him that he might repair the evil which he had done. But he shall see that, in the miserable state to which he is reduced, there is no remedy. He shall hear the angel of the Lord proclaiming and protesting that time shall be no more. "And the angel whom I saw standing . . . . swore by Him that liveth forever and ever . . . . that time shall be no longer."— Apoc. x. 5, 6. O, what cruel swords shall all these gifts and graces be to the heart of the unhappy reprobate, when he shall see that the time in which he could repair his eternal ruin is already past! With tears and despair, he and his com-

panions shall say, "The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved." — Jer. viii. 20 He shall say, "If the fatigues to which I had submitted for my damnation had been borne for God, I should have become a great saint; and now what advantage do I derive from them, but pain and remorse, which shall torment me for eternity?" Ah! the thought that it was in his power to be forever happy, and that he must be forever miserable, shall torture the damned more than the fire and all the other torments of hell.

Affections and Prayers.

Ah, my Jesus, how hast thou been able to bear with me? I have so often turned my back upon thee, and thou hast not ceased to seek after me. I have so often offended thee, and thou hast pardoned me. Ah, impart to me a portion of that sorrow which thou didst feel in the Garden of Gethsemani for my sins, and which made thee there sweat blood. I am sorry, O my Redeemer, for having so badly repaid thy love. O accursed plsasure, I detest and curse thee. Thou hast made me lose the grace of my Lord. My beloved Jesus, I now love thee above all things, and I renounce all unlawful gratifications, and purpose to die a thousand times, rather than ever more offend thee. Ah! through that affection with which thou didst love me on the cross and didst offer for me thy divine life, give me light and strength to resist temptations, and to have recourse to thy aid whenever I shall be tempted. O Mary, my hope, thou art all-powerful with God; obtain for me holy perseverance, obtain for me the grace never more to be separated from his holy love.

THIRD POINT.

The third remorse of the damned shall arise from seeing the great good which they have lost. St. John Chrysostom says that the reprobate shall be tormented more by the loss of paradise, than by the pains of hell. "Plus cœlo torquentur quam gehenna." A certain princess once said, "*If God gives me a reign of forty years, I will renounce paradise.*" The unhappy princess reigned for forty years; but now that her soul has departed from this world, what does she say? Certainly she has changed her sentiments. O, how great at present must be her affliction and despair at the thought of having, for the enjoyment of an earthly reign of forty years, lost for eternity the kingdom of heaven!

But the torment which shall most grievously torture the damned for eternity, shall arise from the conviction that they have lost heaven and God, their Sovereign Good, not by any unlucky accident, nor by the malevolence of others, but by their own fault. They shall see that they have been created for paradise, and that God placed in their hands the choice of procuring for themselves eternal life or eternal death. "Before man is life and death, ... that which he shall choose shall be given him." —Eccl. xv. 18. Thus they shall see that they had it in their power, if they wished, to be eternally happy, and that they have voluntarily precipitated themselves into that pit of torments, from which they can never escape, and from which no one shall ever deliver them. They shall see among the elect many of their companions, who were placed in the same, or perhaps in greater, danger of sinning, and who saved their souls because they restrained their

passions by recommending themselves to God, or, if they fell into sin, soon repented, and gave themselves to God. But, because they would not give up sin, they have in the end unhappily gone to hell — they have fallen into that sea of torments without any hope of remedy for all eternity.

Brother, if you too have been so foolish as, by your own free acts, to lose paradise and God for a miserable pleasure, endeavor as soon as possible to apply a remedy now that you have time. Do not voluntarily continue in your foolishness. Tremble lest you should have to weep over your folly for all eternity. Who knows but this consideration which you now read, is the last call which God will give you? Perhaps, if you do not now change your life, if you commit another mortal sin, the Lord will abandon you, and, in punishment of that sin, send you to suffer forever among that crowd of fools who are now in hell, and confess their error, ("*therefore we have erred,*") but confess it with despair, because they see that it is forever irreparable. When the devil tempts you again to sin, remember hell, have recourse to God and to the most holy Virgin. The thought of hell shall preserve you from hell, because it will make you have recourse to God. "Remember thy last end, and thou shalt never sin." — Eccl. vii. 40.

Affections and Prayers.

Ah, my Sovereign Good, how often have I lost thee for nothing! how often have I deserved to lose thee forever! But I am consoled by the words of thy prophet, "Let the heart of them rejoice that seek the Lord." — Ps. civ. 3. I must not then despair of finding thee again, O my God, if I sincerely seek thee. Yes, my God, I now sigh for thy grace, more than for any other good. I am content to be

deprived of all things, even of life, rather than see myself deprived of thy love. I love thee, O my Creator, above all things; and, because I love thee, I am sorry for having offended thee. O my God, whom I have lost and despised, pardon me immediately, and enable me to find thee again; for I wish never more to lose thee. If thou admittest me again to thy friendship, I will leave all things, and will seek to love thee alone. I hope to do so through thy mercy. Eternal Father, hear me for the love of Jesus Christ; pardon me, and give me the grace never more to be separated from thee. If I voluntarily lose thee again, I ought to fear that thou wilt abandon me. O Mary, O advocate of sinners, obtain for me the grace to make peace with God, and afterwards keep me under thy protection, that I may never more lose him.

TWENTY-NINTH CONSIDERATION.

ON HEAVEN.

"Your sorrow shall be turned into joy."—John xvi. 20.

FIRST POINT.

Let us at present animate ourselves with the hope of heaven, to bear patiently the afflictions of this life, and to offer them to God in return for the sufferings which Jesus Christ endured for the love of us. All these afflictions, sorrows, persecutions, and fears, shall one day have an end, and shall, if we save our souls, become to us sources of joy and happiness in the kingdom of bliss. This is the ground of courage and hope which the Savior holds

out to us. "Your sorrow shall be turned into joy." — John xvi. 20. Let us, then, this day make some reflections on the joys of heaven. But what shall we be able to say on these joys, when the most enlightened of the saints knew not how to give us an idea of that happiness which God has prepared for his faithful servants? David could only say that paradise is a good exceedingly to be desired. "How lovely are thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts!" — Ps. lxxxiii. 2. But, my beloved St. Paul, do you, at least, who had the happiness of being rapt up into heaven, declare to us some of the things you have seen. "No," exclaims the apostle; "what I have seen it is impossible to describe. The delights of heaven are 'secret words which it is not granted to man to utter.'" — 2 Cor. xii. 4. They are so great that they only who enjoy them are able to comprehend them. "All that I can say of them," says the apostle, "is, that 'eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man, what things God hath prepared for them that love him.'" — 1 Cor. ii. 9. No man living has ever seen, or heard, or conceived, the beauty, the harmony, the delights, which God has prepared for those who love him.

At present, it is impossible for us to comprehend the happiness of heaven, because we have no idea but of earthly enjoyments. Were a horse capable of reasoning, he would, if he expected a rich feast from his master, imagine it to consist in excellent hay and oats; for these are the only species of food of which he has any idea. It is thus we form our notions of the happiness of heaven. It is beautiful in the summer to behold at night the starry heaven; it is delightful in the spring to stand on the shore when the sea is unruffled, and to see in its bosom

the rocks covered with sea-weed, and the fishes gliding through the waters; it is also delightful to be in a garden full of fruits and flowers, ornamented with flowing fountains, and enlivened by the flutter and singing of birds: in such a scene one is tempted to exclaim, "O, what a paradise! what a paradise!" But far different are the delights of heaven. To form some imperfect idea of them, let us reflect that in heaven is an all-powerful God, who has pledged himself to make the soul that loves him happy. Do you wish, says St. Bernard, to know what is in heaven? "Nihil est quod nolis, totum est quod velis." There is nothing there that gives displeasure; there is every thing that delights.

O God! what shall be the sentiments of the soul on its entrance into that happy kingdom? Let us represent to our minds the death of a young man, who, after consecrating himself to the love of Jesus Christ, dies and quits this world. The soul is presented for judgment; the Judge embraces her, and pronounces the sentence of her salvation. Her angel-guardian meets and congratulates with her; she thanks him for his assistance, and the angel then says to her, "Rejoice, O happy soul; thy salvation is now secure; come and behold the face of thy Lord." Behold, the soul now passes beyond the clouds, the spheres, the stars, and enters into heaven. O God! what shall be her feelings on first setting her foot in this happy country, and beholding, for the first time, this city of delights! The angels and the saints shall come to meet her, and shall receive her with a joyous welcome. What shall be her consolation in rejoining there her relatives or friends, who have been already admitted into heaven, and in meeting her holy advocates! The soul shall wish to bend her knees to venerate

these saints; but they shall say, "See thou do it not; for I am thy fellow-servant." — Apoc. xxii. 9. She shall thence be carried to kiss the feet of Mary, the queen of heaven. What tenderness shall not the soul experience in first beholding this divine mother, who gave her so much assistance in the work of her salvation! for then the soul shall see all the graces she obtained through the intercession of Mary, who will embrace her with love and tenderness. This queen of heaven shall then conduct the soul to Jesus, who will receive her as his spouse, and will say, "Come from Libanus, my spouse .... thou shalt be crowned." — Cant. iv. 8. My spouse, rejoice; there is now an end to tears, to sufferings, and to fears; receive the eternal crown I have purchased for you by my blood. Jesus himself shall then present her to receive the benediction of his divine Father, who shall embrace and bless her, saying, "Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord," (Matt. xxv. 21,) and shall bestow upon her the same happiness which he himself enjoys.

Affections and Prayers.

Behold, O my God, at thy feet an ungrateful sinner, whom thou hast created for heaven, but who has so often, for the sake of a wretched pleasure, renounced thee to thy face, and has consented to be condemned to hell. But I hope thou hast already pardoned me all the injuries I have done thee, for which I am always sorry, and will be sorry as long as I live. Of these injuries I desire to receive from thee new pardon. But, O God! although my sins have been already forgiven, it will still be always true that I have dared to afflict thee, my Redeemer, who hast given thy life to bring me to thy kingdom. But may thy mercy be forever praised and blessed, O my Jesus, for having borne with me with so much

patience, and for having bestowed upon me multiplied graces, instead of chastising me, as I deserved. I see, my dear Savior, that thou dost ardently desire my salvation, and that thou wishest to bring me to thy kingdom, that I may love thee forever; but it is thy wish that I should first love thee here on earth. Yes; I wish to love thee. Though there were no heaven, I would wish to love thee, while I live, with my whole soul and with all my strength. It is enough for me to know that thou, my God, desirest to be loved by me. My Jesus, assist me by thy grace; do not abandon me. My soul is immortal; I must then either love thee or hate thee for all eternity. Ah! it is my wish to love thee for eternity, and I wish to love thee without reserve here, that I may love thee without reserve hereafter. Dispose of me as thou pleasest; chastise me as thou wishest; do not deprive me of thy love, and then do with me what thou wishest. My Jesus, thy merits are my hope. O Mary, I place great confidence in thy intercession. Thou didst deliver me from hell when I was in sin; now that I wish to give myself to God, obtain for me the grace to save my soul, and to become a saint.

SECOND POINT.

When the soul shall have once entered into the happy kingdom of God, there shall be nothing to molest her. "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and death shall be no more, nor mourning, nor crying, nor sorrow shall be any more; for the former things are passed away. And he that sat on the throne said, Behold, I make all things new." — Apoc. xxi. 4, 5. In heaven there is no infirmity, no poverty, no distress; there are no

longer the vicissitudes of days and nights, nor of cold and heat; but a perpetual day, always serene, an eternal spring, always delightful. There are no persecutions, no envy. In that kingdom of love, all love each other tenderly; and each rejoices in the good of the others as if it were his own. There are no fears; because the soul, being confirmed in grace, can no longer sin nor lose her God. "Behold, I make all things new." Every thing is new; every thing gives consolation and content. The sight shall be filled with delight in beholding this "city of perfect beauty." — Lam. ii. 15. How delightful the view of a city, in which the streets are of crystal, the palaces of silver, the ceilings of gold, and all adorned with festoons of flowers! O, how much more beautiful the city of paradise! how splendid the appearance of these citizens, who are all clothed in royal robes! for, as St. Augustine says, they are all kings. "Quot cives tot reges." How delightful must it be to behold Mary, who shall appear more beautiful than all paradise! But what must it be to see the Lamb of God, the Heavenly Spouse, Jesus! St. Teresa got a transient glimpse of one of the hands of Jesus Christ, and was struck senseless by its beauty. The smell shall be regaled with odors, but with the odors of paradise. The ear shall be delighted with celestial harmony. St. Francis once heard from an angel a single stroke on a violin, and almost died through joy. What, then, must it be to hear the whole choir of saints and angels chanting the glories of God? "They shall praise thee forever and ever." — Ps. lxxxiii. 5. What must it be to hear Mary praising God! St. Francis of Sales says that, as the singing of the nightingale surpasses that of all other birds, so the voice of Mary is far superior to that of

all the other saints. In a word, in heaven are found all the delights which can be desired.

But the joys we have been hitherto considering are the least of the blessings of heaven. The good which constitutes heaven is God himself, the Sovereign Good. "Totum quod expectamus," says St. Augustine, "duæ syllabæ sunt — Deus." The reward which God promises us, is not merely the beauty, the harmony, and the other joys of this blessed city; the chief reward is God himself — that is, to see and love God face to face. "I am thy reward exceeding great." — Gen. xv. 1. St. Augustine says that, if God showed his face to the damned, "hell should be instantly turned into a paradise of delights." — Tom. ix. de trip. habit. And he adds, that, were a departed soul allowed the choice of seeing God, and enduring the torments of hell, or of being delivered from them and deprived of the sight of God, "she would prefer to see the Lord, and to suffer these torments."

During the present life, we cannot comprehend the delight of seeing and loving God face to face; but we may form some notion of it by considering that divine love is so enchanting, that, even in this life, it has sometimes raised up from the earth, not only the souls, but even the bodies, of the saints. St. Philip Neri was once lifted up into the air along with a bench which he seized hold of. St. Peter Alcantara was also elevated from the earth, and a tree which he held was torn up from the roots. St. Vincent, while he was tormented, spoke, says St. Augustine, in such a manner, that one person appeared to suffer, and another to speak. "Alius videbatur pati, alius loqui." St. Lawrence, while he was on the red-hot gridiron, upbraided the tyrant, saying, "*Turn and eat.*" Yes, says St.

Augustine; for St. Lawrence, inflamed with the fire of divine love, was insensible to the burning heat of the fire. "Hoc igne divini amoris accensus non sentit incendium." Besides, how great the sweetness which a sinner experiences on this earth even in weeping over his sins! Hence St. Bernard used to say, If it is so sweet to weep for thee, what must it be to rejoice in thee! "Si tam dulce est flere pro te, quid erit gaudere de te?" What sweetness does not a soul experience when, by a ray of light, God unfolds to her in prayer his goodness, the mercies he has shown her, and the love which Jesus Christ has borne, and still bears to her! In such moments, the soul melts and faints away through love. Yet in this life we do not see God as he is; we see him only in the dark. "We now see through a glass in a dark manner, but then face to face." — I Cor. xiii. 12. At present, there is a veil before our eyes, and God is seen only with the eyes of faith; but what shall be our joy when the veil shall be removed, and we shall see God face to face! We shall then see the infinite beauty of God, his infinite greatness, his justice, his perfection, his amiableness, and his infinite love for us.

Affections and Prayers.

Ah, my Sovereign Good, I am that wretch who has turned my back upon thee, and renounced thy love. I therefore am undeserving of seeing or of loving thee. But, to show mercy to me, thou hast not shown mercy to thyself, but hast condemned thyself to a painful and ignominious death, on an infamous gibbet. Thy death, therefore, makes me hope that I shall one day see and enjoy thee face to face, and that I shall then love thee with all my

strength. But, now that I am in danger of losing thee forever, now that I am conscious of having lost thee by my sins, what shall I do during the remainder of my life? Shall I continue to offend thee? No, my Jesus, I detest with a sovereign hatred the offences I have offered thee. I feel a sovereign sorrow for having insulted thee, and I love thee with my whole heart. Wilt thou cast off a soul that repents and loves thee? No: I know, O my Redeemer, that thou hast said that thou wilt not reject any one that comes to thee with a penitent heart. "Him that cometh to me I will not cast out." — John vi. 37. My Jesus, I renounce all things, and turn to thee. I embrace thee, and unite thee to my heart; do thou also embrace me, and unite me to thy heart. I dare to speak in this manner, because I speak and converse with infinite goodness. I speak with a God who was content to die for the love of me. My dear Savior, grant me perseverance in thy love. My dear mother Mary, through the love which thou bearest to Jesus Christ, obtain for me this perseverance. Such my hope, such my desire.

THIRD POINT.

In this life, the greatest pain which afflicts souls that are in desolation and love God, arises from the fear of not loving him, and of not being loved by him. "Man knoweth not whether he be worthy of love or hatred." — Eccl. ix. 1. But in heaven the soul is certain that she loves God, and that he loves her. She sees that she is happily lost in the love of her Lord, and that he embraces her as a beloved child, and that this love shall not be dissolved for all eternity. These blessed flames shall be aug-

mented by the increased knowledge which the soul shall then have of the greatness of the love of God in becoming man and dying for us; of his love in instituting the most holy sacrament, in which a God becomes the food of a worm. Then also shall the soul clearly see all the graces which God has bestowed upon her in delivering her from so many temptations and so many dangers of perdition; she shall then understand that the tribulations, infirmities, persecutions, and losses, which she called misfortunes, and divine chastisements, were all love, all means intended by divine Providence to conduct her to heaven. She shall see particularly the patience of God in bearing with her after so many sins, and the mercies he had shown her in giving her so many lights and invitations to his love. From that blessed mountain she shall behold so many souls in hell, condemned for less sins than she had committed, and shall see that she is saved, that she is in the possession of God, and secure against all danger of ever losing that Sovereign Good for all eternity.

The blessed then shall forever enjoy that felicity which, during each moment of eternity, shall be always as new as at the first moment of its enjoyment. The soul shall always desire and always possess that joy. She shall be always satisfied, and always thirsty; forever thirsty, and always satiated with delights; because the desire of heaven begets no pain, and its possession produces no tediousness. In a word, as the damned are vessels full of wrath, so the blessed are vessels filled with happiness, so that they have nothing more to desire. St. Teresa says that even in this life, when God introduces a soul into the cellar of wine,—that is, of his love,—she becomes happily inebriated, so that she loses all

affection for earthly things. But, in entering into paradise, how much more perfectly, as David says, shall the elect "be inebriated with the plenty of God's house"! — Ps. xxxv. 9. In seeing God face to face, and in embracing her Sovereign Good, the soul shall be so inebriated with love, that she shall happily lose herself in God — that is, she shall entirely forget herself, and shall think only of loving, of praising, and of blessing the infinite good which she possesses.

When, therefore, the crosses of this life afflict us, let us animate ourselves with the hope of heaven to bear them patiently. St. Mary of Egypt, being asked at the end of her life, by the abbot Zozimus, how she had been able to live for so many years in such a desert, replied, *With the hope of heaven.* When the dignity of cardinal was offered to St. Philip Neri, he threw up the cap in the air, exclaiming, *Paradise! Paradise!* At the mention of paradise, brother Egidius, of the order of St. Francis, was raised up from the ground through joy. Let us likewise, when we are afflicted by the miseries of this life, raise up our eyes to heaven, and console ourselves, saying with a sigh, *Heaven! Heaven!* Let us reflect that if we be faithful to God, all these sorrows, miseries, and fears, shall one day have an end, and we shall be admitted into that blessed country, where we shall enjoy complete happiness as long as God shall be God. Behold, the saints are expecting us, Mary is expecting us, and Jesus stands with a crown in his hand, to make us kings in that eternal kingdom.

Affections and Prayers.

My dear Jesus, thou hast taught me this prayer — *Thy kingdom come.* I therefore now pray that

thy kingdom may come into my heart, so that thou mayst possess it entirely, and that my soul may possess thee, her Sovereign Good. O my Jesus, thou hast spared nothing in order to save me and to acquire my love; save me then, and let my salvation consist in loving thee always, in this life and in the next. I have so often turned my back upon thee, and yet thou assurest me that thou wilt not disdain to embrace me for all eternity in heaven, with as much love as if I had never offended thee. And knowing this, can I ever love any thing else but thee, who wishest to bestow heaven upon me after I had so often deserved hell? Ah, my Lord, would that I had never offended thee! O, were I born again, I would always love thee! But what is done is done. I can now do no more than give thee the remainder of my life. Yes, I give it entirely to thee. I consecrate myself entirely to thy love. Depart from my heart, all earthly affections; give place to my God, who wishes to possess it entirely. Yes; take possession of my whole being, my Redeemer, my Love, and my God. From this day forward I will think only of pleasing thee. Assist me by thy grace. I hope in thy merits. Augment in me continually thy love, and the desire of pleasing thee. Heaven! Heaven! When, O Lord, shall the day come on which I shall see thee face to face, and embrace thee, without fear of ever more losing thee? Ah, my God, keep thy hand upon me, that I may never more offend thee. O Mary, when shall I see myself at thy feet in heaven? Assist me, my mother; do not permit me to be lost, and to go forever to a distance from thee and thy Son.

THIRTIETH CONSIDERATION.

ON PRAYER.

"Ask, and it shall be given you; for every one that asketh receiveth."—Luke xi. 9, 10.

FIRST POINT.

Not only in this, but in a thousand places in the Old and New Testaments, God promises to hear all who pray to him. "Cry to me, and I will hear thee."—Jer. xxxiii. 3. Turn to me, and I will hear you. "Call upon me, and I will deliver you from all dangers."—Ps. xlix. 15. "If you shall ask any thing in my name, that I will do."—John xiv. 14. Whatsoever you shall ask through my merits, I will grant. "You shall ask whatever you will, and it shall be done unto you."—John xv. 7. Ask as much as you wish; all that you ask shall be given you. There are many other similar passages. Hence Theodoret has said that prayer is one, but can obtain all things. "Oratio cum una sit omnia potest." St. Bernard says that, when we pray, the Lord will either give the grace we ask, or one which is more useful to us. "Aut dabit quod petimus aut quod nobis noverit esse utilius."—Ser. in v. Fer. 4, Ciner. The prophet animates us to pray by assuring us that God is all mercy to those who invoke his aid. "Thou, O Lord, art sweet and mild, and plenteous in mercy to all that call upon thee."—Ps. lxxxv. 5. The words of St. James are still more encouraging. "If any of you want wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth abundantly to all men, and upbraideth not."—St. James i. 5. This

apostle tells us that, when we pray to the Lord, he opens his hands, and gives us more than we ask. "*He giveth to all men abundantly, and upbraideth not.*" He does not reproach us with the offences we have offered to him; but, when we pray to him, he appears to forget all the injuries we have done him.

St. John Climacus used to say that prayer in a certain manner forces God to grant us whatsoever we ask of him. "*Prayer piously offers violence to God.*" But it is a violence which is dear to him, and which he desires from us. "Hæc vis grata Deo," says Tertullian. Yes; for, as St. Augustine says, God has a greater desire to give us his graces, than we have to receive them. "Plus vult ille tibi beneficia elargiri, quam tu accipere concupiscas." The reason is, because God is of his own nature infinite goodness. "Deus cujus natura bonitas," says St. Leo. Hence he feels an infinite desire to impart his goods to us. Hence St. Mary Magdalene de Pazzi used to say, that God feels as it were under an obligation to the soul that prays to him; because by prayer she opens to him the way by which he can satisfy his desire of dispensing his graces to us. David says that the goodness of God in instantly hearing all who pray to him, showed him that he was his true God. "In what day soever I shall call upon thee, behold, I know thou art my God." —Ps. lv. 10. Some, observes St. Bernard, complain that God is wanting to them; but the Lord far more justly complains that many are wanting to him by neglecting to ask his graces. "Multi queruntur deesse sibi gratiam, sed multo justius gratia quereretur deesse sibi multos." Of this precisely the Redeemer appears to have complained one day to his disciples. "Hitherto you have not asked any thing in my name; ask, and you shall receive, that

your joy may be full." — John xvi. 24. As if he said, Do not complain of me if you do not enjoy complete happiness; complain of yourselves for not having asked my graces; ask me for them henceforth, and you shall be content.

Hence, in their conferences, the ancient monks came to the conclusion, that there is no exercise more conducive to salvation than to pray always, and say, Lord, assist me, *incline unto my aid, O God.* The Venerable Paul Segneri used to say of himself, that in his meditations he was at first accustomed to spend his time in pious affections; but, having afterwards learned the great efficacy of prayer, he endeavored generally to employ himself in petitions to God. Let us always do the same. We have a God who loves us to excess, and who is solicitous for our salvation, and therefore he is always ready to hear all who ask his graces. The princes of the earth, says St. Chrysostom, give audience only to a few; but God gives audience to all who wish for it. "Aures principis paucis patent, Deo vero omnibus volentibus." — Lib. ii. de Orat. ad Deum.

Affections and Prayers.

Eternal God, I adore thee, and I thank thee for all the benefits thou hast bestowed upon me — for having created me, for having redeemed me through Jesus Christ, for having made me a Christian, for having waited for me when I was in sin, and for having so often pardoned me. Ah, my God, I should never have offended thee, if in my temptations I had recourse to thee. I thank thee for the light by which thou now makest me understand that my salvation consists in praying to thee, and in asking graces of thee. Behold, I entreat thee, in the name of Jesus Christ, to give me a great sorrow for

my sins, holy perseverance in thy grace, a good death, heaven, but, above all, the great gift of thy love, and perfect resignation to thy most holy will. I well know that I do not deserve these graces; but thou hast promised them to all who ask them of thee through the merits of Jesus Christ; through these merits I hope and ask for them. O Mary, thy prayers are always heard; pray for me.

SECOND POINT.

Let us also reflect on the necessity of prayer. St. Chrysostom says that, "as the body without the soul is dead, so the soul is dead without prayer." He also teaches that, as water is necessary to prevent the decay of plants, so prayer is necessary to preserve us from perdition. "Non minus quam arbores aquis, precibus indigemus." — Tom. i. hom. lxxvii. God wills that all men be saved, (1 Tim. ii. 4,) and is unwilling that any be lost. "The Lord . . . . dealeth patiently for your sake, not willing that any one should perish, but that all should return to penance." — 2 Pet. iii. 9. But he also wishes that we ask him for the graces necessary for salvation. For, on the one hand, it is impossible for us to observe the divine commands, and save our souls, without the actual assistance of God; and on the other, ordinarily speaking, God will not give us his graces unless we ask them from him. Hence the holy Council of Trent has declared that "God has not commanded impossibilities; because he either gives us the proximate and actual grace to fulfil his precepts, or he gives us the grace to ask him for this actual aid." — Sess. vi. c. xi. St. Augustine teaches that God gives without prayer the first graces, such as vocation to the faith and to repentance; but all other graces, and particularly the

gift of perseverance, he gives only to those who ask them. "Constat alia Deum dare etiam non orantibus sicut initium fides, alia nonnisi orantibus præparasse, sicut usque in finem perseverantiam." — De Dono Persev. cap. xvi.

Hence theologians, after St. Basil, St. Augustine, St. John Chrysostom, Clement of Alexandria, and others, teach that for adults prayer is necessary as a means of salvation; so that, without it, it is impossible to be saved. And the most learned Lessius says that this doctrine must be held as of faith. "Fide tenendum est orationem adultis ad salutem esse necessariam, ut colligitur ex Scripturis." — De Just. lib. ii. cap. xxvii. num. 9.

The Scriptures are clear on this point. "We ought always to pray." — Luke xviii. 1. "Pray, lest ye enter into temptation." — Luke xxii. 40. "Ask, and you shall receive." — John xvi. 24. "Pray without ceasing." — 1 Thess. v. 17. The words *we ought*, *pray*, *ask*, according to St. Thomas (3 part, qu. 39, art. 5) and the generality of theologians, imply a strict precept, which binds under grievous sin, particularly in three cases — first, when a person is in the state of sin; secondly, when he is in danger of death; and thirdly, when he is in great danger of falling into sin. Theologians teach that, ordinarily, he who neglects prayer for a month, or, at most, for two months, is guilty of a mortal sin. (Less. loco citato.) The reason is, because prayer is a means without which we cannot obtain the helps necessary for salvation.

"*Ask, and you shall receive.*" He who asks receives. "Then," says St. Teresa, "he who does not ask does not receive." And before her, St. James said the same. "You have not, because you ask not." — St. James iv. 2. Prayer is par-

ticularly necessary to obtain the virtue of continence. "And," said the wise man, "as I knew that I could not otherwise be continent, except God gave it, ... I went to the Lord, and besought him." — Wis. viii. 21. Let us conclude this point. He who prays is certainly saved; he who does not pray is certainly lost. All the elect are saved by prayer; all the damned are lost by neglect of prayer; and their greatest despair is, and shall be forever, caused by the conviction, that they had it in their power to save their souls so easily by prayer, and that now the time of salvation is no more.

Affections and Prayers.

Ah, my Reedemer, how have I been able hitherto to live in such forgetfulness of thee? Thou wert prepared to grant me all the graces which I should ask of thee; thou only waitest for me to ask them. But I have thought only of indulging my senses, and have been indifferent about the privation and loss of thy love and of thy graces. Lord, forget all my ingratitude, and have mercy on me. Pardon me all the displeasure I have given thee, and grant me perseverance. O God of my soul, give me the grace always to ask thy aid not to offend thee. Do not permit me to be, as I have hitherto been, negligent in the performance of this duty. Grant me light and strength always to recommend myself to thee, and particularly when my enemies tempt me to offend thee again. Grant, O my God, this grace through the merits of Jesus Christ, and through the love which thou bearest to him. O Lord, I have offended thee enough. I wish to love thee during the remainder of my life. Give me thy love; and may this love remind me to ask thy aid

whenever I shall be in danger of losing thee by sin. Mary, my hope after Jesus, through thy intercession I hope for the grace to recommend myself, in all my temptations, to thee and to thy Son. Hear me, O my queen, through the love which thou bearest to Jesus Christ.

THIRD POINT.

Lastly, let us consider the conditions of prayer. Many pray, and do not obtain the object of their prayers, because they do not pray as they ought. "You ask," says St. James, "and receive not, because you ask amiss." — Epis. iv. 3. To pray well, it is necessary, in the first place, to pray with humility. "God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble." — Ibid. iv. 6. God rejects the petitions of the proud, but does not allow the humble to depart without hearing all their prayers. "The prayer of him that humbleth himself shall pierce the clouds, . . . and he will not depart till the Most High behold." — Eccl. xxxv. 21. This holds, even though they have been hitherto sinners. "A contrite and humble heart, O God, thou wilt not despise." — Ps. i. Secondly, it is necessary to pray with confidence. "No one hath hoped in the Lord, and hath been confounded." — Eccl. ii. 11. Jesus Christ has taught us to call God, in our petitions for his graces, by no other name than that of *Father*, in order to make us pray with the same confidence with which a child has recourse to a parent. He, then, who prays with confidence, obtains every grace. "All things whatsoever you ask when ye pray, believe that you shall receive, and they shall come unto you." — Mark xi. 24. And who, says St. Augustine, can fear that the

promises of God, who is truth itself, shall be violated? "Quis falli metuit dum promittit veritas?" God, says the Scripture, is not like men, who promise, but do not perform, either because they intend to deceive, or because they change their purpose. "God is not as a man, that he should lie, nor as the son of man, that he should be changed. Hath he told them, and will he not do?" — Num. xxiii. 19. And why, adds the same St. Augustine, should the Lord so earnestly exhort us to ask his graces, if he did not wish to bestow them upon us? "Non nos hortaretur ut peteremus nisi dare vellet." — De Verb. Dom. serm. v. By his promises he has bound himself to grant us the graces we ask from him. "*By promising*," says St. Augustine, "*he has made himself a debtor.*" — Ibid. serm. ii.

But some will say, "I am a sinner, and therefore I do not deserve to be heard." In answer, St. Thomas says that the efficacy of prayer to obtain graces, depends, not on our merits, but on the divine mercy. "Oratio impetrando non innititur nostris meritis, sed soli divinæ misericordiæ." — 2. 2. qu. 178, art. 2, ad. 1. "Every one," says Jesus Christ, "that asketh, receiveth," (Luke xi. 10;) "that is," says the author of the Imperfect Work, "every one, whether he be a just man or a sinner." — Hom. xviii. But the Redeemer himself takes away all fear, saying, "Amen, amen, I say to you, If you ask the Father any thing in my name, he will give it to you." — John xvi. 23. As if he said, Sinners, if you are without merits, I have merits before my Father. Ask, then, in my name, and I promise that you shall receive whatsoever you ask. But it is necessary to know that this promise does not extend to temporal favors, such as health, goods of fortune, and the like; for God often justly refuses

these graces, because he sees that they should be injurious to our salvation. "The physician," says St. Augustine, "knows better than the patient what is useful to him." "Quid infirmo sit utile, magis novit medicus quàm ægrotus."—Tom. iii. chap. ccxii. The holy doctor adds, that God refuses to some through mercy what he gives to others through wrath. "Deus negat propitius quæ concedit iratus." Hence we should ask temporal blessings only on condition that they shall be profitable to the soul. But spiritual graces, such as pardon of sins, perseverance, divine love, and the like, should be asked absolutely, and with a firm confidence of obtaining them. "If," says Jesus Christ, "you, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father from heaven give the good Spirit to them that ask him!"—Luke xi. 13.

Above all, perseverance in prayer is necessary. In his commentary on the eleventh chapter of St. Luke, Cornelius a Lapide says, that the Lord "wishes us to persevere in prayer even to importunity." This may be inferred from the following passages of Scripture—"We ought always to pray."—Luke xviii. 1. "Watch ye, therefore, praying at all times."—Luke xxi. 36. "Pray without ceasing."—1 Thess. v. 17. It may be also inferred from our Lord's repeated exhortations to prayer. "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you."—Luke xi. 9. It might be sufficient to have said *ask;* but no; the Lord wishes us to understand that we ought to imitate beggars, who do not cease to ask, to entreat, and to knock at the gate, until they receive an alms. But final perseverance, in particular, is a grace which is not obtained without continual prayer. We cannot merit this grace of perseverance; but, ac-

cording to St. Augustine, it may be merited in a certain manner. "'This gift," says the holy doctor, "can be suppliantly merited; that is, it may be obtained by supplication."—De Dono Persev. cap. vi. Let us, then, if we wish to be saved, pray always, and never cease to pray. And let all confessors and preachers, if they desire the salvation of souls, never cease to exhort their penitents or hearers to prayer. And, in conformity with the advice of St. Bernard, let us always have recourse to the intercession of Mary. "Let us ask grace, and ask it through Mary; for what she asks she obtains, and her prayer cannot be fruitless."—Serm. de Aquæduct.

Affections and Prayers.

My God, I hope that thou hast already pardoned me; but my enemies shall not cease to fight against me till death. Unless thou dost assist me, I shall lose thee again. Ah! through the merits of Jesus Christ, I ask holy perseverance. Do not permit me to be separated from thee. And I ask the same grace for all who are at present in the state of grace. I hope with certainty in thy promise, that thou wilt give me persèverance if I shall continue to ask it from thee. But I fear that in my temptations shall I neglect to have recourse to thee, and that thus shall I relapse into sin. I therefore ask of thee the grace never more to neglect prayer. Grant that, in the occasions in which I shall be in danger of relapsing, I may recommend myself to thee, and may invoke the aid of the most holy names of Jesus and Mary. My God, this I purpose and hope to do with the assistance of thy grace. Hear me for the sake of Jesus Christ. O Mary, my mother, obtain for me the grace, that, in all dangers of losing God, I may have recourse to thee and to thy Son.

THIRTY-FIRST CONSIDERATION.

ON PERSEVERANCE.

"He that shall persevere to the end, he shall be saved."—Matt. xxiv. 13.

FIRST POINT.

St. Jerome says, that many begin well, but few persevere. "Incipere multorum est, perseverare paucorum."—Lib. i. Contra Jovin. Saul, Judas, Tertullian, began well, but ended badly, because they did not persevere in grace. "Non quæruntur in Christianis initia," says the same St. Jerome, "sed finis."—Ep. ad Fur. The Lord, says the saint, requires not only the beginning of a good life, but also the end; it is the end that shall be rewarded. St. Bonaventure says, that the crown is given only to perseverance. "Sola perseverantia coronatur." Hence St. Lawrence Justinian calls perseverance the gate of heaven. "Cœli januam." No one can enter paradise unless he find the gate of heaven. My brother, at present you have renounced sin, and justly hope that you have been pardoned. You are then the friend of God; but remember that you are not yet saved. And when shall you be saved? When you shall have persevered to the end. "He that shall persevere to the end, he shall be saved." Have you begun a good life? Thank the Lord for it; but St. Bernard warns you that to him who begins, a reward is only promised, and is given only to him who perseveres. "Inchoantibus præmium promittitur, perseverantibus datur."—Serv. de modo bene viv. It is not enough to run for

the prize; you must run till you win it. "So run," says St. Paul, "that you may obtain."—1 Cor. ix. 24.

You have already put your hand to the plough, and you have begun to live well; but now you must tremble and fear more than ever. "With fear and trembling work out your salvation."—Philip. ii. 12. And why? Because if (God forbid it should happen) you look back and return to a life of sin, God shall declare you unfit for paradise. "No man putting his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."—Luke ix. 62. At present, through the grace of God, you avoid evil occasions, you frequent the sacraments, and make meditation every day. Happy you if you continue to do so, and if, when he shall come to judge you, Jesus Christ shall find you doing these things. "Blessed is that servant whom, when his Lord shall come, he shall find so doing."—Matt. xxiv. 46. But do not imagine that, now that you have begun to serve God, there is as it were an end, or a lack of temptations; listen to the advice of the Holy Ghost. "Son, when thou comest to the service of God . . . . prepare thy soul for temptation."—Eccl. ii. 1. Remember that now, more than ever, you must prepare yourself for conflicts, because your enemies, the world, the devil, and the flesh, shall arm themselves now, more than ever, to fight against you, in order to deprive you of all that you have acquired. Denis, the Carthusian, says, that the more a soul gives herself to God, the more strenuously hell labors to destroy her. "Quanto quis fortius nititur Deo servire, tanto acrius adversus eum sævit adversarius." And this is sufficiently expressed in the Gospel of St. Luke, where Jesus Christ says, "When the unclean spirit is gone out

of a man, he walketh through places without water; seeking rest, and not finding it, he saith, I will return into my house, whence I came out. And when he is come, he findeth it swept and garnished. Then he goeth, and taketh with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and entering in, they dwell there. And the last state of that man becomes worse than the first." — Luke xi. 24, 25, 26. When banished from a soul, the devil finds no repose, and does every thing in his power to return; he even calls companions to his aid; and if he succeeds in reëntering, the second fall of that soul shall be far more ruinous than the first.

Consider, then, what arms you must use in order to defend yourself against these enemies, and to preserve your soul in the grace of God. To escape defeat, and to conquer the devil, there is no other defence than prayer. St. Paul says that we have to contend, not with men of flesh and blood like ourselves, but with the princes of hell. "Our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers." — Eph. vi. 12. By these words the apostle wished to admonish us that we have not strength to resist such powerful enemies, and that we stand in need of aid from God. With his aid we shall be able to do all things. "I can do all things in him that strengtheneth me." — Phil. iv. 13. Such the language of St. Paul; such, too, should be our language. But this divine aid is given only to those who pray for it. "*Ask, and you shall receive.*" Let us, then, not trust in our purposes; if we trust in them, we shall be lost. Whenever the devil tempts us, let us place our entire confidence in the divine assistance, and let us recommend ourselves to Jesus Christ and most holy Mary. We ought to do this particularly as

often as we are tempted against chastity. For this is the most terrible of all temptations, and is the one by which the devil gains most victories. We have not strength to preserve chastity; this strength must come from God. "And," said Solomon, "as I knew that I could not otherwise be continent except God gave it . . . . I went to the Lord, and besought him." — Wis. viii. 21. In such temptations, then, we must instantly have recourse to Jesus Christ, and to his holy mother, frequently invoking the most holy names of Jesus and Mary. He who does this shall conquer; he who neglects it shall be lost.

Affections and Prayers.

Ah, my God, "cast me not away from thy face." I know that thou shalt never abandon me, unless I first abandon thee. Experience of my own weakness makes me tremble lest I should again forsake thee. Lord, it is from thee I must receive the strength necessary to conquer hell, which labors to make me again its slave. This strength I ask of thee for the sake of Jesus Christ. O my Savior, establish between thee and me a perpetual peace, which shall never be broken for all eternity. For this purpose I ask thy love. "He who loves not, is dead." O God of my soul, it is by thee I must be saved from this unhappy death. I was lost; thou knowest it. It is thy goodness alone that has brought me into the state in which I am at present, in which I hope I am thy friend. Ah, my Jesus, through the painful death which thou didst suffer for my salvation, do not permit me ever more to lose thee voluntarily. I love thee above all things. I hope to see myself always bound with this holy love, and to die in the bonds of love, and to live for eter-

nity in the chains of thy love. O Mary, thou art called the mother of perseverance; through thee this great gift is dispensed. Through thy intercession I ask and hope to obtain it.

SECOND POINT.

Let us now see how we must conquer the world. The devil is a great enemy of our salvation, but the world is worse. If the devil did not make use of the world and of wicked men, by whom we mean the world, he should not obtain the victories which he gains. "But," says Jesus Christ, "beware of men." —Matt. x. 17. Men are often worse than the devils; for these fly away when we pray and invoke the most holy names of Jesus and Mary. But when a person gives a becoming answer to wicked companions, who tempt him to sin, they redouble their efforts, they treat him with ridicule, upbraiding him with vulgarity and want of education; and when they can say nothing else, they call him a hypocrite, who only pretends to sanctity. To escape such derision and reproach, certain weak souls miserably associate with these ministers of Lucifer, and return to the vomit. My brother, be persuaded that, if you wish to lead a holy life, you must expect the ridicule and contempt of the wicked. "The wicked," says the Holy Ghost, "loathe them that are in the right way." —Prov. xxix. 27. He who lives in sin cannot bear the sight of those who live according to the Gospel. And why? Because their life is a continual reproach to him; and therefore, to avoid the pain of remorse caused by the good example of others, he would wish that all should imitate his own wickedness. There is no remedy. The apostle tells us that he who serves God must be persecuted

by the world. "All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." — 2 Tim. iii. 12. All the saints have been persecuted. Who more holy than Jesus Christ? The world persecuted him so as to condemn him to die on a cross, exhausted of his blood.

There is no alternative; for the maxims of the world are diametrically opposed to the maxims of Jesus Christ. What the world esteems, Jesus Christ has called folly. "For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God." — 1 Cor. iii. 19. And the world regards as folly what Jesus Christ has strongly recommended, such as crosses, pains, and contempt. "For the word of the cross, to them indeed that perish, is foolishness." — 1 Cor. i. 18. But, if the wicked revile and reproach us, let us console ourselves with the reflection that God blesses and praises us. "They will curse, and thou wilt bless." — Ps. cviii. 28. Is it not enough for us to be praised by God, by Mary, by the angels, the saints, and all good men? Let us, then, leave sinners to say what they please, and let us continue to please God, who is grateful and faithful to all who serve him. The greater the opposition and difficulty we meet in doing good, the more we shall please God and treasure up merit for ourselves. Let us imagine that we are alone with God in this world. When the wicked treat us with derision, let us recommend them to the Lord, let us thank him for giving us light, which he does not give to these miserable men, and let us continue our journey. Let us not be ashamed to appear like Christians; for, if we are ashamed of Jesus Christ, he protests that he will be ashamed of us on the day of judgment. "For he that shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him the Son of man shall be ashamed,

when he shall come in his majesty." — Luke ix. 26.

If we wish to save our souls, we must resolve to suffer, and to do violence to ourselves. "How narrow is the gate and strait is the way that leadeth to life!" — Matt. vii. 14. "The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent bear it away." — Matt. xi. 12. He who does not violence to himself, shall not be saved. There is no remedy. If we wish to do good, we must act in opposition to our rebellious nature. In the beginning, it is particularly necessary to do violence to ourselves in order to root out bad habits, and to acquire habits of virtue. When good habits are once acquired, the observance of the divine law becomes easy, and even sweet. Our Lord said to St. Bridget, that when, in the practice of virtue, a person suffers the first punctures of the thorns with patience and courage, these thorns afterwards become roses. Be attentive, then, dearly beloved Christian. Jesus Christ now says to you what he said to the paralytic: "Behold, thou art made whole; sin no more, lest some worse thing happen to thee." — John v. 14. Remember, says St. Bernard, that if you have the misfortune of relapsing into sin, your relapse shall be more disastrous than all your falls. "Audi recidere quam incidere esse deterius." Woe, says the Lord, to them who begin to walk in the way of God, and afterwards forsake it. "Woe to you, apostate children." — Isa. xxx. 1. Such sinners are punished as rebels against God's light. "They have been rebellious to the light." — Job xxiv. 13. The chastisement of these rebels, who have been favored by God with a great light, and have been afterwards unfaithful to him, is, to remain in blindness, and thus die in their sins. "But if the just man turn

himself away from his justice .... shall he live? All his justices which he hath done shall not be remembered; in the prevarication by which he hath prevaricated, and in his sin which he hath committed, in them he shall die." — Ezec. xviii. 24.

Affections and Prayers.

Ah, my God! such a chastisement I have often deserved, because I have, through the light which thou gavest me, renounced sin, and have miserably returned to it. I infinitely thank thy mercy for not having abandoned me in my blindness by leaving me entirely destitute of light, as I deserved. Great, then, O my Jesus, are my obligations to thee, and great should be my ingratitude, were I again to turn my back upon thee. No, my Redeemer; the mercies of the Lord I will sing forever. I hope that, during the remainder of my life, and for all eternity, I will always sing and praise thy mercies, by loving thee always, and never more seeing myself bereft of thy graces. The great ingratitude with which I have hitherto treated thee, and which I now hate and curse above every evil, shall serve to make me weep bitterly over the injuries I have done thee, and to inflame me still more with the love of thee, who, after I had given thee so many grievous offences, hast bestowed upon me so many great graces. Yes, I love thee, O my God, worthy of infinite love. Henceforth thou shalt be my only love, my only good. O eternal Father, through the merits of Jesus Christ I ask of thee final perseverance in thy grace and in thy love. I know that thou wilt grant it to me whenever I shall ask it. But who assures me that I shall be careful to ask this perseverance from thee? Hence, O my God, I ask perseverance, and the grace always to ask it of

thee. O Mary, my advocate, my refuge, and my hope, obtain for me, by thy intercession, the gift of constancy in always asking of God the grace of final perseverance. Through the love which thou bearest Jesus Christ, I ask thee to obtain for me this gift.

THIRD POINT.

Let us come to the third enemy, that is, the flesh, which is the worst of all; and let us see how we must defend ourselves against its attacks. The first means is prayer; but this we have already considered. The second is, to avoid the occasions of sin; and let us now ponder well upon this means of overcoming the flesh. St. Bernardine says that the greatest of all counsels, and the one which is, as it were, the foundation of religion, is to fly from sinful occasions. "Inter consilia Christi unum celeberrimum et quasi religionis fundamentum est fugere peccatorum occasiones." — Tom. i. serm. xxi. art. 3, cap. 3. Being compelled by exorcisms, the devil once confessed that, of all sermons, that which displeased him most was the sermon on avoiding the occasions of sin; and justly; for the devil laughs at all the resolutions and promises of penitent sinners who remain in the occasion of sin. The occasion of sins of the flesh, in particular, is like a veil placed before the eyes, which prevents the soul from seeing either her resolutions, or the lights received from God, or the truths of eternity; in a word, it makes her forget every thing, and almost blinds her. The neglect of avoiding the occasions of sin was the cause of the fall of our first parents. God had forbidden them even to touch the forbidden fruit. "God commanded us," said Eve, "that we should not eat, and that we should not touch it." — Gen. iii. 3

But through want of caution she *saw, took, and ate it.* She first began to look at the apple, she afterwards took it in her hand, and then ate it. "He who loves danger shall perish in it."—Eccl. iii. 27. St. Peter tells us that the devil *goeth about seeking whom he may devour.* And what, says St. Cyprian, does he do in order to enter again into the soul from which he has been expelled? He seeks an occasion of sin. "Explorat an sit pars, cujus aditu penetretur." If the soul permit him to bring her into the occasion of sin, he shall enter again, and shall devour her. Guerric, the abbot, says that Lazarus came forth from the grave bound hand and foot —"Prodiit ligatus manibus et pedibus;" and after rising in this state he died again. Miserable, this author means to say, is the man who rises from sin bound by the occasion of sin; though he should rise, he surely shall die again. He, then, who wishes to be saved, must forsake, not only all sin, but the occasions of sin, that is, the companions, the house, the connections which lead to sin.

But you will say, "I have changed my life, and now I have no bad motive, nor even a temptation, in the society of such a person." I answer, It is related, that in Mauritania there are bears that go in search of the apes. As soon as they see a bear, the apes save themselves by climbing up the trees. But what does the bear do? He stretches himself, as if dead, under the tree; and when the apes descend, he springs up, seizes, and devours them. It is thus the devil acts; he makes the temptations appear dead; and when the soul exposes herself to the occasion of sin, he excites the temptation, which devours her. O, how many miserable souls, that practised mental prayer, frequented communion, and might be called saints, have, by putting themselves

into dangerous occasions, become the prey of hell! It is related in ecclesiastical history, that a holy matron who devoted herself to the pious work of burying the martyrs, found one of them not dead. She brought him to her house; he recovered. What happened? By the proximate occasion, these two saints, as they might be called, first lost the grace of God, and afterwards lost the faith.

"The Lord commanded Isaias to proclaim that all flesh is grass." — Isa. xl. 6. Is it possible, says St. John Chrysostom, for hay not to burn when it is thrown into the fire? "Lucernam in fœnum pone, ac tum aude negare quod fœnum exuratur." And St. Cyprian says that it is impossible to stand in the midst of flames, and not be burned. "Impossibile est flammis circumdari, et non ardere." — De sing. cler. According to the prophet Isaias, our strength is like that of tow cast into the fire. "And your strength shall be as the ashes of tow." — Isa. i. 31. And Solomon says that it would be folly to expect to walk on red-hot coals without being burnt. "Can a man walk upon hot coals, and his feet not be burned?" — Prov. vi. 27, 28. Thus it is likewise folly to expose ourselves to the occasion of sin, and to expect not to fall. It is necessary then to fly from sin as from the face of a serpent. "Flee from sins as from the face of a serpent." — Eccl. xxi. 2. We ought, says Gualfrido, not only to avoid the bite or contact of a serpent, but should also abstain from approaching it. "Fuge etiam tactus, etiam accessum." But you will say, "My interest requires that I should frequent such a house, or that I should keep up a certain friendship." But if you see that such a house is for you a way to hell, there is no remedy; you must forsake it if you wish to save your soul. "Her house is the way to hell." —

Prov. vii. 27. The Lord tells you that if your right eye is a cause of damnation to you, you must pluck it out and cast it from you. — Matt. v. 29. Mark the words, *from you;* you must cast it, not beside you, but to a distance from you; that is, you must take away every occasion of sin. St. Francis of Assisium says that the devil tempts spiritual souls, who have given themselves to God, in a way different from that in which he tempts the wicked. In the beginning he does not seek to bind them with a chain; he is content to hold them by a single hair; he then binds them with a slender thread; afterwards with a cord; then with a chain; and thus drags them to sin. And therefore he who wishes to be free from the danger of perdition, must, in the beginning, break all these hairs; he must avoid all occasions of sin; he must give up these salutations, presents, billets, and the like. And for those who have contracted a habit of sins against purity, it will not be enough to avoid proximate occasions; unless they fly even from remote occasions, they shall relapse.

He who sincerely wishes to be saved, must, by often repeating with the saints, *Let all be lost provided God is not lost*, labor continually to strengthen and renew his resolution of never again renouncing the friendship of God. But it is not enough to resolve never more to lose God; it is moreover necessary to adopt the means by which you may be preserved from the danger of losing him. The first means is, to avoid the occasions of sin; of this we have already spoken. The second is, to frequent the sacraments of penance and the eucharist. In the house which is often swept, there is no uncleanness. By the sacrament of penance the soul is purified; by it she obtains not only the remission

of sins, but also help to resist temptations. The communion is called the bread of heaven; because as the body cannot live without earthly food, so the soul cannot live without this celestial bread. "Except you eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, you shall not have life in you." — John vi. 54. But, on the other hand, to those who frequently eat this bread, is promised eternal life. "If any man eat of this bread he shall live forever." — John vi. 52. Hence the Council of Trent calls the communion a medicine which delivers us from venial, and preserves us from mortal sins. — Sess. xiii. cap. ii. The third means is, meditation, or mental prayer. "Remember thy last end, and thou shalt never sin." — Eccl. vii. 40. He who keeps before his eyes the eternal truths — death, judgment, eternity — shall not fall into sin. God enlightens us in meditation. "Come ye to him, and be enlightened." — Ps. xxxiii. 6. In meditation God speaks to us and makes known to us what we are to avoid, and what we are to do. "I will lead her into the wilderness, and I will speak to her heart." — Osee ii. 14. Meditation is the blessed furnace in which divine love is lighted up. "In my meditation a fire shall flame out." — Ps. xxxviii. 4. To preserve the soul in the grace of God, it is, as has been already said, absolutely necessary always to pray, and to ask for the graces we stand in need of. They who do not make mental prayer, shall scarcely pray for God's graces; and by neglecting to pray for them, they shall certainly be lost.

It is necessary then to adopt the means of salvation, and to lead a life of order and regularity. It is necessary, after rising in the morning, to make the Christian acts of thanksgiving, love, oblation,

and a purpose of avoiding sin, along with a prayer to Jesus and Mary that they may preserve you from sin during the day; you should afterwards make your meditation, and hear mass. During the day, you ought to read a spiritual lecture, make a visit to the blessed sacrament and to an image of the divine mother. In the evening, say the rosary, and make an examen of conscience. Go to communion several times in the week, according as your director may advise; you should ordinarily go to confession to the same confessor. It would also be very profitable to make the spiritual exercises in some religious house. It is likewise necessary to honor most holy Mary by some special devotion — such as by fasting on Saturday. She is called the mother of perseverance, and she promises to obtain it for all who serve her. "They that work by me shall not sin." — Eccl. xxiv. 30. Above all, it is necessary to ask of God holy perseverance, and especially in the time of temptation, invoking then more frequently the names of Jesus and Mary as long as the temptation continues. If you act in this manner, you shall certainly be saved; if not, you shall certainly be lost.

Affections and Prayers.

My dear Redeemer, I thank thee for the lights which thou now givest me, and for the means of salvation which thou makest known to me. I promise to endeavor to persevere in the practice of them. I see that thou wishest for my salvation; and I wish to be saved principally to please thy heart, which so ardently desires my salvation. O my God, I will no longer resist the love which thou entertainest for me. This love has made thee bear me with so much patience when I offended

thee. Thou callest me to thy love, and I desire only to love thee. I love thee, O infinite Goodness, I love thee, O infinite Good. Ah, I entreat thee, through the merits of Jesus Christ, not to permit me to be ever again ungrateful to thee; either make me cease to be ungrateful to thee, or make me cease to live. Lord, thou hast already begun the work; bring it to perfection. Give me light, give me strength, give me love. O Mary, who art the treasurer of graces, assist me, accept me for thy servant, and pray to Jesus for me. Through the merits of Jesus Christ first, and then through thy prayers, I hope for salvation.

THIRTY-SECOND CONSIDERATION.*

ON CONFIDENCE IN THE PATRONAGE OF MARY.

"He that shall find me, shall find life, and shall have salvation from the Lord."—Prov. viii. 35.

FIRST POINT.

"O, how great should be our thankfulness to the mercy of God, for having given us for our advo-

* In a notice to the reader, prefixed to the "Glories of Mary," St. Alphonsus explains the sense in which he wished his doctrine regarding the privileges of the Blessed Virgin to be understood. He concludes this explanation in the following words: "Then, to say all in a few words, the God of all holiness, in order to glorify the Redeemer, has decreed and ordained, that her great charity should pray for all those for whom her divine Son has paid and offered the most superabundant price of his precious blood, in which alone is '*our*

cate Mary, who, by her prayers, can obtain for us all the graces we stand in need of." — St. Bonaventure, in Salve Reg. Sinners, brethren, if we find ourselves debtors to the divine justice, and condemned to hell by our sins, let us not despair; let us have recourse to this divine mother; let us put ourselves under her protection, and she will save us. But we must have a sincere purpose of amending our lives. If we have such a purpose, and place confidence in Mary, we shall be saved. And why? Because Mary is a *powerful* advocate, a *merciful* advocate, an advocate *that desires to save all.*

In the first place, let us consider that Mary is a *powerful* advocate, who can obtain from the Judge all graces for her servants. This is a singular privilege, given to her by the Judge himself, who is her

salvation, life, and resurrection.' And, on the foundation of this doctrine, and inasmuch as they accord with it, I have intended to lay down my propositions, which the saints, in their affectionate colloquies with Mary, and in their fervent discourses upon her, have not hesitated to assert." — Glories of Mary, Monza edition, vol. i. pp. 11, 12.

In the third chapter of the first volume, (pp. 123, 124,) St. Alphonsus compares the hope which we place in the Blessed Virgin, to the confidence which a person has in a minister of state, whom he asks to procure a favor from his sovereign.

"Whatsoever Mary obtains for us, she obtains it through the merits of Jesus Christ, and because she prays in the name of Jesus Christ." — Glories of Mary, vol. i. p. 188.

"Mary, then, is said to be omnipotent in the manner in which omnipotence can be understood of a creature; for a creature is incapable of a divine attribute. Thus she is omnipotent, inasmuch as she obtains, by her prayers, whatever she asks." — Ibid. p. 223.

To obtain favors through the intercession of Mary, by practising devout exercises in her honor, "the first condition is, that we perform our devotions with a soul free from sin, or, at least, with a desire to give up sin." "If a person wish to commit sin with the hope of being saved by the Blessed Virgin, he shall thus render himself unworthy, and incapable of her protection." — Glories of Mary, vol. ii. pp. 325, 326.

Son. "It is a great privilege, that Mary is most powerful with her Son." — St. Bonav. in Spec. lect. vi. John Gerson says (tract. vi. Sup. Magn.) that the Blessed Virgin asks nothing from God with an absolute will, which she does not obtain; and that, like a queen, she sends the angels to enlighten, to purify, and to perfect her servants. Hence, to inspire confidence in this great advocate, the church makes us invoke her under the title of Powerful Virgin. *Powerful Virgin, pray for us.* And why is the patronage of Mary so powerful? Because she is the mother of God. "The prayer of the divine mother," says St. Antonine, "partakes of the nature of a command, and therefore it is impossible for her not to be heard." — Part iv. tit. 25, cap. xvii. sec. 4. The prayers of Mary are the prayers of a mother, and are therefore regarded by Jesus Christ in a certain manner as commands; hence it is impossible that her petitions should be rejected. St. Gregory, archbishop of Nicomedia, says that "the Redeemer, as if to discharge the obligation which he owes to his mother for having given to him his human nature, hears all her prayers." — Orat. de Exitu Mar. Hence St. Theophilus, bishop of Alexandria, has written, "The Son is pleased that his mother should pray to him, because he wishes to grant her whatsoever she asks, in order to repay her for the favor received from her in giving him flesh." Hence the martyr Methodius exclaimed, "Rejoice, rejoice, O Mary; you have for a debtor your Son. We are all debtors to him; but he is a debtor to thee alone." — Orat. Hyp. Dom.

Hence Cosmas of Jerusalem says, that "the intercession of Mary is omnipotent." Yes, her prayers are omnipotent, because, as Richard of St. Lawrence says, "it is but just that the mother should

partake of the power of the Son. The Son, then, who is omnipotent, has made the mother omnipotent." — Lib. iv. de Laud. Virg. The Son is omnipotent by nature; the mother is omnipotent by grace — that is, she obtains by her prayers whatsoever she asks. This was revealed to St. Bridget, (Rev. lib. i. cap. iv.,) who one day heard Jesus Christ addressing his mother in the following words: "Ask from me what you wish; for your petition cannot be fruitless." My mother, ask as much as you please; for I shall hear all your prayers. He then subjoins the reason: "Because you refused me nothing on earth, I will refuse nothing to you in heaven." You refused me nothing when I lived on earth; it is just that I should refuse nothing to you now that you are with me in heaven.

In fine, there is no sinner, however abandoned, whom Mary cannot save by her intercession. "You have," says St. Gregory of Nicomedia, "insuperable strength, lest the multitude of our sins should overcome your clemency. Nothing resists your power; for the Creator regards your glory as his own." — Orat. de Exit. B. V. O mother of God, nothing can resist your power, since your Creator regards your glory as his own. "Nothing, then," says St. Peter Damian, "is impossible to you, who can raise even those who are in despair to hopes of salvation." Serm. i. de Nativ. B. V.

Affections and Prayers.

My dear queen and mother, Mary, I will address thee in the words of St. Germanus. "Thou art omnipotent in saving sinners; thy prayers are all-powerful with God, because thou art the mother of

true life." — Serm. iii. in Dom. B. V. Then, O my mistress, if I have recourse to thee, all my sins cannot make me despair of salvation. Thou obtainest by thy prayers whatever thou wishest. If thou prayest for me, I shall certainly be saved. I will then say to thee with St. Bernard, "Pray for me, who am so miserable, O great mother of God; for thy Son hears thee, and grants whatsoever thou askest." I am indeed a sinner; but I wish to amend my life, and I glory in being specially devoted to thee. I am, it is true, unworthy of thy protection; but I know that thou hast never abandoned any one who has placed his trust in thee. Thou art able and willing to save me, and I trust in thee. When I was in the state of perdition, and forgetful of thee, thou didst think of me, and obtained for me the grace to enter into myself. How much more ought I to trust in thy mercy now that I am dedicated to thy service, and that I recommend myself with confidence to thy prayers! O Mary, pray for me, and obtain for me the grace to be a saint. Obtain for me holy perseverance; obtain for me a great love of thy Son, and of thee, O my amiable mother. I love thee, O my queen, and hope to love thee always. Do thou also love me, and obtain for me the grace that I may be transformed from a sinner into a saint.

SECOND POINT.

Let us consider, in the second place, that Mary is an advocate as merciful as she is powerful, and that she knows not how to refuse her protection to any soul that has recourse to her. The eyes of the Lord, says David, are upon the just; "and this mother of mercy," says Richard of St. Lawrence,

" keeps her eyes upon the just and upon sinners, that she may preserve them from falling into sin, or that, should they fall, she may raise them up." St. Bonaventure used to say " that, in looking at Mary, he seemed to behold mercy itself." Hence St. Bernard exhorts us to recommend ourselves with great confidence, in all our necessities, to this powerful advocate, " who is all sweetness and benignity to those who invoke her intercession." " Nihil austerum in ea, nihil terribile; tota suavis est." Hence Mary is called an olive-tree. " As a fair olive-tree in the plains." — Eccl. xxiv. 19. As from the olive-tree nothing comes forth but oil, the symbol of mercy, so from the hands of Mary nothing flows but the graces and mercies which she dispenses to all who take shelter under her protection. Hence Denis the Carthusian has justly called her " the advocate of all sinners who have recourse to her." O God! how great shall be the remorse of the damned Christian in thinking that, during life, he could have saved his soul with so much facility by invoking the intercession of this mother of mercy; that he had not done so; and that there shall be no more time to do it! The Blessed Virgin said one day to St. Bridget, I am called, and I really am, the mother of mercy; for such God has made me. " I am called by all the mother of mercy, and truly his mercy has made me merciful." — Rev. lib. i. cap. vi. And who, but God in his mercy, (because he desires our salvation,) has given us this advocate to defend us? " Therefore," adds Mary, " miserable shall he be, who, while it is in his power, has not recourse to me, who am merciful." Miserable is the man, and miserable for eternity, who, though he could, during life, have recommended himself to me, who am so benign and

merciful to all, has neglected to have recourse to me, and is lost.

"Perhaps," says St. Bonaventure, "we are afraid that, in asking Mary's intercession, she will refuse it to us?" "No," says the saint, "no; Mary does not refuse, and never has refused, pity and aid to any sinner who has invoked her intercession. She has not done so, and she cannot do so; because God has made her the queen and the mother of mercy; and as queen of mercy she is bound to attend to the care of the miserable." "You," says St. Bernard, "are the queen of mercy; and who but the miserable are the subjects of mercy?" Hence, the saint, through humility, adds, "Since, then, O mother of God, you are queen of mercy, you ought to have a special care of me, who am the most miserable of sinners." As mother of mercy, it is her duty to deliver from death her sick children, to whom her mercy makes her a mother. Hence St. Basil calls her "a public hospital." Public hospitals are erected for the poor; and they who are in the greatest poverty have the best claims to be admitted into them. Hence, according to St. Basil, Mary ought to receive with the greatest tenderness and care the greatest sinners who have recourse to her.

But let us not doubt of the mercy of Mary. One day St. Bridget heard the Savior saying to his mother, "You would show compassion to the devil, should he ask it with humility." The haughty Lucifer will never humble himself to ask her prayers; but if he humbled himself to this divine mother, and invoked her help, she, by her intercession, would deliver him from hell. By these words, Jesus Christ wished to give us to understand what Mary herself afterwards said to the same St. Bridget,

"that when a sinner has recourse to her, however enormous his guilt may be, she regards not the sins with which he is charged, but the intention with which he comes. If he comes with a sincere desire to amend, she receives him and heals all his wounds." Hence St. Bonaventure says, "Poor sinners! do not despair; raise your eyes to Mary, and trust in the mercy of this good mother." — In Ps. viii. "Let us then," says St. Bernard, "ask the grace we have lost, and let us ask it through Mary." — Serm. de Aquæd. "The grace which we have lost she has found," says Richard of St. Lawrence; "we therefore ought to go to her in order to recover it." — De Laud. Virginis, lib. ii. When the archangel Gabriel announced to the most holy Virgin the divine maternity, he said to her, "Fear not, Mary, thou hast found grace." — Luke i. 30. But, since Mary was never deprived of grace, but was, on the contrary, always full of grace, how could he say that she had found it? In answer to this question, Cardinal Hugo says, that Mary found grace, not for herself, because she had always possessed it, but for us, who have lost it. Hence the same author says, that we ought to go to her and say, O lady, property ought to be restored to him who has lost it; the grace which you have found is not yours, for you have always possessed it; it is ours; we have lost it through our own fault; you should then restore it to us. "Let sinners, then, who have lost grace by their sins, run, let them run to the Virgin, and say with confidence, Restore to us our property, which you have found."

Affections and Prayers.

Behold, O great mother of God, at your feet a miserable sinner, who has not once, but several

times, voluntarily lost the divine grace, which thy Son had purchased for him by his death. O mother of mercy, I come to thee with a soul covered with wounds and sores; be not angry with me on that account, but have the greater pity on me, and assist me. I do not ask of thee earthly goods; I ask thee to obtain for me the grace of God and the love of thy Son. My mother, pray for me, and never cease to pray for me. It is through the merits of Jesus Christ and thy intercession that I am to be saved. Thy office is to intercede for sinners; I will then say with St. Thomas of Villanova, "Fulfil thy office; recommend me to God, and defend me." No cause, however desperate, is lost when defended by thee. Thou, after Jesus, art the hope of sinners; thou art my hope. O Mary, I will not cease to serve thee, to love thee, and to have recourse to thee always. Do not, then, ever cease to pray for me, particularly when thou seest me in danger of again losing the grace of God. O Mary, O great mother of God, have pity on me.

THIRD POINT.

Let us consider, in the third place, that Mary is so merciful an advocate, that she not only assists all who have recourse to her, but also goes in search of the miserable, in order to defend and save them. Behold how she invites us all, and encourages us to hope for every good, if we have recourse to her. "In me is all hope of life and virtue. Come over to me, all." — Eccl. xxiv. 25, 26. In explaining this passage, the devout Pelbart says, "She invites all, the just and sinners." The devil, according to St. Peter, goes about continually seeking whom he may devour. — 1 Peter v. 8. "But this divine

mother," says Bernard da Bustis, "goes about seeking whom she may save." — Marial, part iii. serm. iii. Mary is called the mother of mercy; because, like a mother, she cannot see her children in danger of being lost without giving them assistance. Mary pities all our miseries, and constantly seeks our salvation. "And," says St. Germanus, "who, after Jesus, has greater care of our salvation than you, O mother of mercy?" — Serm. de Zona Virg. St. Bonaventure says, "that Mary is so solicitous about the relief of the miserable, that she appears to desire nothing with greater ardor than to comfort them." — Super. Salv. Reg.

"She certainly assists us as often as we have recourse to her; no one has ever been rejected by her," says the Idiota. — Præf. in Cantic. "But this," adds Richard of St. Victor, "is not enough for her; she anticipates our supplications, and obtains aid for us before we ask her prayers." — In Cant. cap. xxiii. Moreover, the same author says, that Mary is so full of mercy, that, as soon as she sees misery, she instantly obtains relief, and cannot behold any one in distress without coming to his assistance. It was thus she acted when she lived on this earth, as we learn from what happened at the marriage of Cana in Galilee; where, when the wine failed, she did not wait to be asked, but, taking pity on the affliction and shame of the spouses, asked her Son to console them, saying, "They have no wine." Thus she induced him to change, by a miracle, water into wine. "But," says St. Bonaventure, "if Mary's compassion for the afflicted was so great while she was in this world, her pity for us is certainly much greater now that she is in heaven, where she has a better knowledge of our miseries, and greater compassion for us." — In Spect. B. V

cap. viii. Novarino adds, "If Mary, unasked, shows such readiness to afford relief, how much more careful will she be to console those who ask her prayers!"

"Ah! let us never cease to have recourse, in all our necessities, to the divine mother, who is always ready to obtain relief for all who pray to her," says Richard of St. Lawrence. And Bernardine da Bustis adds, "that she desires more ardently to obtain graces for us, than we do to receive them." — Marial, i. serm. v. de Nom. Mar. Hence he sasy that, "whenever we have recourse to her, we shall always find her hands full of graces and mercies." According to St. Bonaventure, Mary's desire for our welfare and salvation is so great, that she feels offended, not only with those who do her a positive injury, but also with those who neglect to ask favors from her. — S. Bon., Spec. Virg. And, on the other hand, the saint affirms that they who invoke Mary's intercession (that is, with a determination to amend their lives) are saved. Hence he calls her "the salvation of those who invoke her." Let us, then, always have recourse to the divine mother, and always say to her with the holy doctor, In thee, O lady, have I hoped; may I not be confounded forever. No, O lady, O mother of God, O Mary, I shall not be lost after having placed my hopes in thee after Jesus.

Affections and Prayers.

O Mary, behold at thy feet a miserable slave of hell, who implores thy mercy. I, indeed, deserve no good; but thou art the mother of mercy, and mercy is exercised in favor of those who are unworthy of it. The whole world calleth thee the refuge and the hope of sinners; then thou art my refuge

and my hope. I am a lost sheep; but, to save the lost sheep, the Eternal Word came down from heaven, and became thy Son; he wishes that I have recourse to thee, and that thou assist me by thy prayers. *Holy Mary, mother of God, pray for us, sinners.* O great mother of God, thou prayest for all; pray to thy Son also for me; tell him that I am thy client, and that thou art my protectress; tell him that in thee, after him, I have placed all my hopes; tell him to pardon me, that I repent of all the insults I have offered to him; tell him to grant me in his mercy holy perseverance; tell him to grant me the grace to love him with my whole heart. In fine, tell him to save me. He does whatsoever thou askest. O Mary, my hope, in thee I trust; have pity on me.

THIRTY-THIRD CONSIDERATION.

ON THE LOVE OF GOD.

"Let us therefore love God, because God hath first loved us." —1 John iv. 19.

FIRST POINT.

Consider, in the first place, that God deserves your love, because he has loved you before you loved him, and because he has been the first of all to love you. "I have loved thee with an everlasting love." — Jer. xxxi. 3. Your parents have been the first to love you on this earth; but they have loved you only after they have known you. Before your father or your mother came into this world, God

loved you; even before the world was created, he loved you. And how long before the creation of the world did God love you? Perhaps a thousand years, or a thousand ages? It is useless to count years or ages; God has loved you from eternity. "I have loved thee with an everlasting love; therefore have I drawn thee, taking pity on thee." — Jer xxxi. 3. In a word, as long as he has been God, he has loved you; as long as he has loved himself, he has loved you. Hence the holy virgin St. Agnes had reason to say, "*I am prevented by another lover.*" When the world and creatures sought her love, she answered, "No, I cannot love you. My God has been the first to love me; it is but just, then, that I should consecrate all my love to him alone."

Thus, my brother, God has loved you from eternity, and through pure love has taken you from among so many men whom he could create; he has given you existence, and has placed you in the world. For the love of you, God has created so many other beautiful creatures, that they might serve you, and remind you of the love which he has borne to you, and of the love which you owe to him. "Heaven and earth," says St. Augustine, "tell me to love you." When the saint looked at the sun, the moon, the stars, the mountains, the rivers, they appeared to him to speak, and say, *Augustine, love your God; for he has created us for you, that you might love him.* The abbot De Rance, founder of La Trappe, when he saw a hill, a fountain, or a flower, would say that all these creatures upbraided him with ingratitude to God. In holding a flower or a fruit in her hand, St. Mary Magdalene de Pazzi felt her heart wounded as it were by a dart of divine love, and would say within

herself, "Then, my God has from eternity thought of creating this flower or fruit, that I might love him."

Consider, moreover, the special love God has shown to you in making you be born in a Christian country, and in the bosom of the true church. How many are born among idolaters, Jews, Mahometans, or heretics, and are all lost! The number of those who have the happiness of being born in a country where the true faith prevails, is small, compared with the rest of mankind, and he has chosen you to be one of that small number. O, what an infinite gift is the gift of faith! How many millions are deprived of the sacraments, of sermons, of the examples of good companions, and of all the other helps to salvation which are found in the true church! And God has resolved to give all these great helps to you without any merit on your part, and even with a foreknowledge of your demerits; for when he thought of creating you, and bestowing these graces upon you, he foresaw the insults which you would offer to him.

Affections and Prayers.

O Sovereign Lord of heaven and earth, infinite good, infinite majesty, who hast loved men so tenderly, how does it happen that thou art so much despised by them? But, among these men, thou, O my God, hast loved me in a particular manner, and hast bestowed on me special graces, which thou hast not given to so many others. And I have despised thee more than others. I prostrate myself at thy feet. O Jesus, my Savior, "cast me not away from thy face." I would deserve to be cast off on account of my frequent ingratitude to thee. But thou hast said that thou wilt not reject a penitent

soul that returns to thee. "Him that cometh to me, I will not cast out." — John vi. 37. My Jesus, I am sorry for having offended thee. Hitherto I have not known thee. I now acknowledge thee for my Lord and Redeemer, who hast died in order to save me and to be loved by me. When, O my Jesus, shall I cease to be ungrateful to thee? When shall I begin truly to love thee with a true love? Behold, I this day resolve to love thee with my whole heart, and to love nothing but thee. O infinite Goodness, I adore thee for all those who do not adore thee, and I love thee for all who do not love thee. I believe in thee, I hope in thee, I love thee, and offer my whole being to thee. Assist me by thy grace; thou knowest my weakness. But if thou didst bestow so many graces upon me when I neither loved nor desired to love thee, how much greater graces should I hope for from thy mercy now that I love thee and desire only to love thee! My Lord, give me thy love, but a fervent love, which shall make me forget all creatures; a strong love, which shall make me conquer all difficulties in order to please thee; a perpetual love, which shall never be dissolved between me and thee. I hope for all graces through thy merits, O my Jesus; and I hope for them through thy intercession, O my mother, Mary.

SECOND POINT.

But God has not only given us so many beautiful creatures — he was not content until he even gave up himself. "He loved us and delivered himself up for us." — Gal. ii. 20. Accursed sin had robbed us of the divine grace, and made us the slaves of hell; but, to the astonishment of heaven and of all

nature, the Son of God came on earth to become man in order to redeem us from eternal death, and to purchase for us the grace and the eternal glory which we had lost. How great should be our wonder if we saw a monarch become a worm for the love of worms! But our astonishment should be infinitely greater at the sight of a God made man for the love of men. "He emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, ... and in habit found as man." — Phil. ii. 7. A God clothed in flesh! "And the word was made flesh." — John i. 14. But the astonishment increases when we see all that this Son of God has done and suffered for the love of us. To redeem us it would be sufficient for him to have shed a single drop of his blood, or a single tear, or to have offered a single prayer; for a prayer offered by a divine person should be of infinite value, and therefore sufficient for the salvation of the whole world, and of an infinite number of worlds. But, says St. Chrysostom, what was sufficient for redemption was not sufficient for the immense love which this God bore to us. "Quod sufficiebat redemptioni non sufficiebat amori." He not only wished to save us, but, because he loved us ardently, he wished to be loved ardently by us; and therefore he resolved to lead a life full of sorrows and humiliations, and to suffer a death the most painful of all deaths, in order to make us understand the infinite love which he entertained for us. "He humbled himself, becoming obedient unto death, even to the death of the cross." — Phil. ii. 8. O excess of divine love, which all men and all angels shall never be able to comprehend! I say, *excess;* for Moses and Elias, speaking of the passion of Jesus Christ, called it an excess. — Luke ix. 31. St. Bonaventure called the passion of Christ an ex-

cess of sorrow and of love. "*Excessus doloris, excessus amoris.*" If our Redeemer had not been God, but a friend or a relative, what greater proof of love could he have given, than to die for us? "Greater love than this no man hath, that a man lay down his life for his friends." — John xv. 13. If Jesus Christ had to save his own Father, he could not have done more for the love of him! If, my brother, you had been God and the creator of Jesus Christ, what more could he have done for you than sacrifice his life in the midst of a sea of torments and sorrows, for the love of you? If the most contemptible man on earth had done for you what Jesus Christ has done for you, could you live without loving him?

But what do you say? Do you believe in the incarnation and death of Jesus Christ? You believe these mysteries; and do you not love him? or can you think of loving any thing but Jesus Christ? "He," says St. Augustine, "has come on earth to suffer and to die for you in order to make known to you the immense love which he bears you." Propterea Christus advenit ut cognosceret homo quantum eum diligat Deus. Before the incarnation, man might doubt whether God loved him tenderly; but how, after the incarnation and death of Jesus Christ, can he any longer doubt that God loves him with the most tender love? And what greater tenderness of affection could he show you, than to sacrifice his divine love for the love of you? Our ears are accustomed to hear of creation, of redemption, of a God in a manger, of a God on a cross. O holy faith, enlighten us.

Affections and Prayers.

O my Jesus, I see that thou couldst have done nothing more in order to compel me to love thee;

and I also see that by my ingratitude I have labored to force thee to abandon me. Blessed forever be thy patience, which has borne with me so long. I would deserve a hell made on purpose for myself; but thy death gives me confidence. Ah! make me understand well the claims which thou, O infinite Good, hast to my love, and the obligations by which I am bound to love thee. I knew, O my Jesus, that thou hast died for me; how then, O God, have I been able to live for so many years in forgetfulness of thee? O that the past years of my life commenced again! I would wish, O my Lord, to give them all to thee. But years do not return. Ah! grant that I may at least spend all the remaining days of my life in loving and pleasing thee. My dear Redeemer, I love thee with my whole heart; but increase this love within me. Remind me always of all that thou hast done for me, and do not permit me to be any longer ungrateful to thee. No; I will no longer resist the lights thou hast given me. Thou wishest to be loved by me, and I desire to love thee. And whom will I love, if I do not love a God of infinite beauty and infinite goodness? a God who has died for me? a God who has borne me with so much patience, and who, instead of chastising me as I deserved, has changed chastisements into graces and favors? Yes, I love thee, O God worthy of infinite love, and I sigh and seek to live wholly employed in loving thee, and forgetful of every thing but thee. O infinite charity of my Lord, assist a soul that ardently desires to be entirely thine. O great mother of God, Mary, do thou too assist me by thy intercession; beg of Jesus to make me belong entirely to him.

THIRD POINT.

Our astonishment increases when we consider the ardor with which Jesus Christ desired to suffer and die for the love of us. "I have a baptism," said Jesus Christ, "wherewith I am to be baptized; and how am I straitened until it be accomplished!" — Luke xii. 50. I am to be baptized with the baptism of my own blood; and I feel myself dying through a desire that my passion and death may soon come, that thus man may soon know the love which I bear to him. It was this desire that made him say on the night before his passion, "With desire have I desired to eat this pasch with you before I suffer." — Luke xxii. 15. Then, says St. Basil of Seleucia, it appears that our God cannot be satiated with loving men. "Hominum amore nequit expleri Deus." — S. Bas. cap. 416.

Ah, my Jesus! men do not love you because they do not think of the love which you have had for them. O God! how is it possible for a soul to live without loving God, if she considers that he died for her sake, and that he died with so great a desire of showing his love for her? "The charity of Christ presseth us." — 2 Cor. v. 14. St. Paul says that it is not so much what Jesus Christ has done and suffered for our salvation, as the love which he has displayed in suffering for us, that obliges, and, as it were, forces us to love him. Contemplating the love which Jesus Christ exhibits in his passion, St. Lawrence Justinian exclaimed, "Vidimus sapientem præ nimietate amoris infatuatum." We have seen a God as it were foolish, through the excess of his love for us. And who could ever believe, had not faith assured us of it, that the Creator would die for his own creatures? In an ecstasy, St. Mary

Magdalene de Pazzi, carrying a crucifix in her hands, exclaimed, "*Yes, my Jesus, you are foolish through love.*" This the Gentiles also said when they heard the apostles preaching the death of Jesus Christ; they, as St. Paul attests, regarded it as folly which could not be believed. "We preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews indeed a stumbling-block, and unto the Gentiles foolishness." — 1 Cor. i. 23. And how, said they, could a God that is most happy in himself, and stands not in need of any one, descend on earth, to become man, and die for the love of men, who are his creatures? This would be the same as to believe that a God had become foolish for the sake of men. But it is of faith that Jesus Christ, the true Son of God, has delivered himself to death for the love of us. "Christ hath loved us, and hath delivered himself for us." — Eph. v. 2.

And why has he done so? He has done so that we might live no longer to the world, but only to that Lord who has died for us. "Christ died for all, that they also who live may not live to themselves, but unto him who died for them." — 2 Cor. v. 15. He has done it that, by the love which he has shown us, he might win all the affections of our hearts. "For to this end Christ died and rose again, that he might be the Lord both of the dead and of the living." — Rom. xiv. 9. Hence the saints, contemplating the death of Jesus Christ, thought it very little to give their life and all things for the love of so loving a God. How many noblemen, how many princes, have left relatives, riches, country, and even kingdoms, to shut themselves up in a cloister, in order to live only to the love of Jesus Christ! How many martyrs have sacrificed their life! how many tender virgins, renouncing the nuptials of the great, have gone with joy to death, in

order thus to make some return for the affection of a God who had died for their sake! And, my brother, what have you hitherto done for the sake of Jesus Christ? As he has died for the saints, for St. Lawrence, for St. Lucy, for St. Agnes, so he has also died for you. What do you intend to do during the remaining days of life, which God gives you that you may love him? From this day forward, look frequently at the crucifix, and, in looking at it, call to mind the love which Jesus Christ has borne you, and say within yourself, "Then have you, my God, died for me?" Do this at least, I say, and do it often; if you do, you cannot but feel yourself sweetly constrained to love a God who has loved you so tenderly.

Affections and Prayers.

Ah, my dear Redeemer, it is true that I have not loved thee, because I have not reflected on the love which thou hast borne me! Ah, my Jesus, I have been very ungrateful to thee! Thou hast given thy life for me, by submitting to the most painful of all deaths; and have I been so ungrateful as not even to think of thy sufferings? Pardon me; I promise, O my crucified Love, that from this day forward thou shalt be the only object of my thoughts and of all my affections! Ah, when the devil or the world presents me a forbidden apple, remind me, O my beloved Savior, of the pains which thou hast endured for my sake, that I may love thee, and may never more offend thee! Ah! if one of my servants had done for me what thou hast done, I could not bring myself to displease him. And I have dared to turn my back so often on thee, who hast died for me. O beautiful flames, which have obliged a God to give his life for me, come, inflame, fill my whole

heart, and destroy all affections to created things. Ah, my beloved Redeemer, how is it possible for me to contemplate thee, either in the manger in Bethlehem, on the cross on Calvary, or in the sacrament on our altars, and not be enamored of thee? My Jesus, I love thee with my whole soul. During the remaining years of my life, thou shalt be my only good, my only love. I have unhappily lived long enough forgetful of thy passion and of thy love. I give thee all things, and if I do not give myself to thee as I ought, take me, and reign in my whole heart. "*Thy kingdom come.*" May my heart be the servant only of thy love. May I speak of nothing else, may I treat of nothing else, may I think of nothing else, may I sigh and desire only to love and please thee. Assist me always by thy grace, that I may be faithful to thee. In thy merits I trust, O my Jesus. O mother of fair love, make me ardently love thy Son, who is so amiable, and who has loved me so tenderly.

THIRTY-FOURTH CONSIDERATION.

ON THE HOLY COMMUNION.

"Take ye, and eat: this is my body."—Matt. xxvi. 26.

FIRST POINT.

Let us consider the great gift which Jesus Christ has bestowed on us in the institution of the most holy sacrament; the great love he has shown to us in this gift; and his great desire that we should

receive this gift. Let us, in the first place, consider the great gift which Jesus Christ has bestowed upon us in giving us himself entirely for our food in the holy communion. St. Augustine says that Jesus Christ, though an omnipotent God, has nothing more to give us. "Cum esset omnipotens, plus dare non potuit." And what greater treasure, adds St. Bernardine of Sienna, can a soul receive or desire, than the sacred body of Jesus Christ? "Quis melior thesaurus in corde hominis esse potest, quam corpus Christi?" The prophet Isaias exclaims, O men, proclaim aloud the loving inventions of our good God.—Isa. xii. 4. And if our Redeemer had not bestowed this gift upon us, who among us could have asked it? Who could have dared to say to him, Lord, if you wish to make us understand your love, remain under the species of bread, and permit us to make you our food? Even to think of it would be considered folly. "Does it not," says St. Augustine, "appear foolishness to say, Eat my flesh—drink my blood"? When Jesus Christ made known to his disciples this great gift of the most holy sacrament which he wished to leave us, they could not bring themselves to believe it; and, therefore, they departed from him, saying, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat? . . . . This saying is hard, and who can hear it?"—St. John vi. 53, 61. But what men could never imagine, the great love of Jesus Christ has invented and executed.

St. Bernardine says that the Lord has left us this sacrament as a memorial of the love he has shown us in his passion—"Hoc sacramentum est memoriale suæ dilectionis." And this accords with what Jesus Christ himself has said—"Do this for a commemoration of me."—Luke xxii. 19. The

love of our Savior, adds St. Bernardine, was not content with sacrificing his life for our salvation; before his death, this love constrained him to bequeath to us the greatest gift which he had ever bestowed upon us, by giving us himself for our food. "In illo fervoris excessu quando paratus erat pro nobis mori, ab excessu amoris majus opus agere coactus est, quam unquam operatus fuerat, dare nobis corpus in cibum." — S. Ber. Sen., tom. ii. serm. liv. cap. i. The abbot Guerric says that, in this sacrament, Jesus made the last effort of love. "Omnem vim amoris effudit amicis." — Serm. v. de Ascens. This was better expressed by the Council of Trent, which declared that, in the eucharist, Jesus poured out all the riches of his love for men. "Divitias sui erga homines amoris velut effudit." — Sess. xiii. cap. ii.

How great, says St. Francis de Sales, the tenderness of love which a prince would show to a beggar by sending him a part of what he had on his own plate! How much greater should it be, if he sent him the entire of his own dinner! But what would it be, if he sent him, for his food, a part of his own arm! In the holy communion, Jesus gives us not only a portion of his own dinner, not only a part, but the entire of his body. "Take ye, and eat; this is my body." And with his body he gives us his soul and his divinity. In a word, St. Chrysostom says that, in giving you himself in the holy communion, he gives you all that he has, and reserves nothing for himself. "Totum tibi dedit, nihil sibi reliquit." And the angelic doctor says that, "in the eucharist, God has given us all that he is and has." Behold! exclaims St. Bonaventure, that God whom the world cannot contain, makes himself our prisoner in the most holy sacrament.

"Ecce quem mundus capere non potest, captivus noster est." And since the Lord gives himself entirely to us in the eucharist, how can we fear that he should refuse us any grace which we ask of him? "How," says St. Paul, "hath he not also, with him, given us all things?" — Rom. viii. 32.

Affections and Prayers.

O my Jesus, what has induced thee to give thyself entirely to us for our food? After this gift, what more remains for thee to give us in order to oblige us to love thee? Ah, Lord, give us light, make us understand the excess of thy love in becoming food in order to unite thyself to poor sinners! But, if thou givest thyself entirely to us, it is just that we too give our whole being to thee. O my Redeemer, how have I been able to offend thee, who hast loved me so tenderly, and who hast done so much to gain my love? Thou hast become man for my sake, thou hast died for me, thou hast become my food; tell me, what more couldst thou have done? I love thee, O infinite Goodness; I love thee, O infinite Love. Lord, come often to my soul; inflame my whole heart with thy holy love; grant that I may forget all things in order to think only of thee, and to love nothing but thee. Most holy Mary, pray for me, and by thy intercession make me worthy to receive thy Son frequently in the holy sacrament.

SECOND POINT.

Let us consider, in the second place, the great love which Jesus Christ has shown us in giving us himself in the holy eucharist. The most holy sacrament is a gift which has proceeded from pure love

For our salvation it was necessary, according to the decree of God, that the Redeemer should die, and, by the sacrifice of his life, satisfy the divine justice for our sins; but what necessity was there that Jesus Christ, after having died for our redemption, should leave himself to us for our food? But this his love wished to do. He, says St. Lawrence Justinian, instituted the eucharist for no other purpose than to show his great charity, ("ob suæ eximiæ charitatis indicium,") for no other purpose than to make us understand the immense love which he bears us. This is precisely what St. John has written — "Jesus knowing that his hour was come, that he should pass out of this world to the Father; having loved his own, he loved them to the end." — St. John xiii. 1. Knowing that the time of his departure from this earth had arrived, he wished to give us the greatest proof of his love, by bequeathing to us this gift of the most holy sacrament. This is the precise meaning of the words, *he loved them to the end;* that is, according to Theophilactus and St. Chrysostom, "he loved them with an extreme love."

And mark what the apostle has observed — that the time at which Jesus Christ wished to bequeath this gift, was the time of his death. "The Lord Jesus, the same night on which he was betrayed, took bread, and, giving thanks, broke, and said, Take ye, and eat; this is my body." — 1 Cor. xi. 23, 24. At the very time that men prepared for him scourges, thorns, and a cross to crucify him, the loving Savior wished to leave us this the last proof of his love. And why at death, and not before that time, has he instituted this sacrament? Because, says St. Bernardine, the marks of love given by friends at death make a greater impression

on the memory, and are preserved with greater affection. "Quæ in fine in signum amicitiæ celebrantur, firmius memoriæ imprimuntur, et cariora tenentur." Jesus Christ, says the saint, had already given himself to us in many ways; he had given himself to us for a companion, a master, a father; for our light and our victim. The last degree of love remained; and this was, to give himself to us for our food, in order to unite himself entirely to us, as food is united to him who eats it. This he has done by giving himself to us in the most holy sacrament. "Ultimus gradus amoris est, cum se dedit nobis cibum, quia se dedit ad omnimodam unionem, sicut cibus et cibans invicem uniuntur." Thus our Redeemer was not content with uniting himself only with our human nature; he wished by this sacrament to find a means of also uniting himself with each of us in particular.

St. Francis de Sales says, "that in no other action can the Savior be considered more tender or more loving than in the institution of the holy eucharist; in which he, as it were, annihilates himself, and becomes food, in order to penetrate our souls, and to unite himself to the hearts of his faithful servants." Thus, says St. Chrysostom, to that Lord on whom the angels dare not fix their eyes, we are united, and are made one body and one flesh. "Huic nos unimur, et facti sumus unum corpus et una caro." What shepherd, adds the saint, has ever fed his sheep with his own blood? Even mothers intrust their children to the care of nurses. But Jesus, in the sacrament, nourishes us with his own blood, and unites us to himself. "Quis pastor oves proprio pascit cruore? Et quid dico pastor? Matres multæ sunt, quæ filios aliis tradunt nutricibus: hoc autem ipse non est passus, sed ipse nos

proprio sanguine pascit." — Hom. lx. And why become our food? Because, says the saint, he loved us ardently, and by making himself our food, he wished to unite himself entirely to us, and to make himself one thing with us. "Semetipsum nobis immiscuit, ut unum quid simus: ardenter enim amantium hoc est." — Hom. li. Then Jesus Christ wished to perform the greatest of his miracles, ("He hath made a remembrance of his wonderful works; he hath given food to them that fear him." — Ps. cx. 4,) in order to satisfy his desire of remaining with us, and of uniting in one our heart and his own most holy heart. "O, wonderful is your love, O Lord Jesus," exclaims St. Lawrence Justinian, "who wished to incorporate us in such a manner with yourself, that we should have one heart and one soul inseparably united with you."

That great servant of God, Father Della Columbiere, used to say, If any thing could shake my faith in the mystery of the eucharist, I would not doubt of the power, but rather of the love, which God displays in this sacrament. If you ask me how bread becomes the body of Jesus, how Jesus is found in many places, I answer that God can do all things. But if you ask me how it is that God loves men so as to make himself their food, I can only say that I do not understand it, and that the love of Jesus cannot be comprehended. But, O Lord, to reduce yourself to the condition of food, appears to be an excess of love not suited to your majesty. But St. Bernard's answer is, that love makes lovers forget their own dignity. "Amor nescius dignitatis." St. Chrysostom also answers, that love seeks not what is convenient when there is question of making itself known to the beloved; it goes not where it ought, but where it is carried by the ardor

of its desire. "Amor ratione caret, et vadit quo ducitur, non quo debeat." — Serm. cxlv. Justly, then, has the angelic doctor called this sacrament a sacrament of love — a pledge of love. "Sacramentum charitatis, charitatis pignus." — Opusc. 68. And St. Bernard calls it *love of loves*. "Amor amorum." St. Mary Magdalene de Pazzi used to call Holy Thursday, the day on which this sacrament was instituted, *the day of love*.

Affections and Prayers.

O infinite love of Jesus, worthy of infinite love! Ah, my Jesus, when shall I love thee as thou hast loved me? Thou couldst do nothing more to make me love thee; and I have forsaken thee, O infinite Good, for the sake of vile and miserable goods! Ah, enlighten me, O my God! Discover to me always more and more the greatness of thy goodness, that my whole soul may be enamored of thee, and that I may labor to please thee. I love thee, O my Jesus, my love, my all; and I wish to unite myself frequently with thee in this sacrament, in order to detach myself from all things, and to love thee alone, who art my life. Through the merits of thy passion, assist me, O my Redeemer. O mother of Jesus, and my mother, do thou too assist me; beg of him to inflame my whole heart with his holy love.

THIRD POINT.

Let us, in the third place, consider the great ardor with which Jesus Christ desires that we should receive him in the holy communion. "Jesus knowing that his hour was come." — John xiii. 1. But how could Jesus call the night on which his bitter passion should commence, *his hour?* He

calls it *his hour*, because on that night he was to institute this divine sacrament in order to unite himself entirely to his beloved souls. This desire made him say, "With desire I have desired to eat this pasch with you." — Luke xxii. 15. Words by which the Redeemer wished to show us the great ardor with which he desired to unite himself with each of us in this sacrament. *With desire I have desired.* Words which, according to St. Lawrence Justinian, proceeded from his immense love for us. "Flagrantissimæ charitatis est vox hæc." This is the language of the most burning love. The Redeemer wished to give himself to us under the appearance of bread, that all might be able to receive him. Had he given himself to us under the appearance of costly food, the poor should not be able to receive him; and had he instituted the holy sacrament under the appearance of any other cheap food, this, perhaps, should not be found in all parts of the world. Jesus wished to leave himself under the species of bread, because it costs but little, and is found in every country; so that all persons in all places may find him and receive him.

Through his great desire that we should receive him, the Redeemer not only presses us to receive him by so many invitations — "Come, eat my bread, and drink the wine which I have mingled for you," (Prov. ix. 5;) "Eat, O friends, and drink, and be inebriated, my dearly beloved," (Cant. v. 1,) but he also commands us to receive him. "Take ye, and eat; this is my body." — Matt. xxvi. 26. Moreover, he endeavors to allure us to the holy table by promises of eternal life. "He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood hath life everlasting." — John vi. 55. "He that eateth this bread shall live forever." — Ibid. ver. 59. He

also threatens to exclude from paradise all who neglect to receive him in the holy sacrament. "Except you eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, you shall not have life in you."—Ibid. ver. 53. These invitations, promises, and threats, all proceed from the ardent desire of Jesus Christ to unite himself with us in this sacrament. And this desire springs from the great love which he bears us; for, as St. Francis de Sales says, the end of love is nothing else than to be united with the object of love. And because in this sacrament Jesus unites himself entirely to the soul—"He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood, abideth in me and I in him," (John vi. 57,)—therefore he desires so ardently that we receive him. Our Lord said one day to St. Matilda, "The bee does not cast itself on the flower from which it sucks the honey, with as much ardor as I come to the soul that desires to receive me."

O, if the faithful understood the great blessing which the holy communion brings to the soul! Jesus is the Lord of all riches; for his Father has made him master of all things. "Knowing that the Father had given him all things into his hands."—John xiii. 3. Hence, when Jesus Christ comes to a soul in the holy communion, he brings with him immense treasures of graces. "Now all good things," says Solomon, speaking of the eternal wisdom, "came to me together with her."—Wis. vii. 11.

St. Denis says that the most holy sacrament has the greatest efficacy in sanctifying the soul. "Eucharistia maximam vim habet perficiendæ sanctitatis." And St. Vincent Ferror asserts that the soul derives greater profit from one communion, than from fasting for a week on bread and water

The communion, as the Council of Trent teaches, is that great remedy which delivers us from venial, and preserves us from mortal sins. "Antidotum quo a culpis quotidianis liberemur et a mortalibus preservemur." — Sess. xiii. cap. ii. Hence St. Ignatius, martyr, has called the most holy sacrament the medicine of immortality. "Pharmacum immortalitatis." Innocent the Third has said that, by his passion, Jesus Christ has delivered us from the punishment of sin; but, by the eucharist, he preserves us from the commission of sin. "Per crucis mysterium liberavit nos a potestate peccati, per eucharistiæ sacramentum liberat nos a potestate peccandi."

Moreover, this sacrament kindles the fire of divine love. "He brought me into the cellar of wine; he set in order charity in me. Stay me up with flowers, compass me about with apples; because I languish with love." — Cant. ii. 4, 5. St. Gregory of Nyssa says, that the holy communion is this cellar of wine; in which the soul is so inebriated with divine love, that she forgets the earth and all creatures; it is thus the soul languishes with holy charity. The venerable Father Francis Olympius, of the order of Theatines, used to say, that there is nothing so powerfully calculated to inflame the soul with divine love, as the holy communion. God is love and a fire of love. "God is charity." — 1 John iv. 8. "My God is a consuming fire." — Deut. iv. 54. And this fire of love the Eternal Word came to light upon the earth. "I am come to cast fire on the earth; and what will I but that it be kindled?" — Luke xii. 49. O, what burning flames of holy love does Jesus kindle in the souls who receive him in this sacrament with a desire of being inflamed with his love! St. Catharine of Sienna

saw, one day, in the hands of a priest, Jesus, in the holy sacrament, like a furnace of love; and wondered that the hearts of all men were not set on fire, and reduced to ashes, by the flames which issued from the holy eucharist. St. Rosa of Lima used to say, that in receiving Jesus Christ, she felt as if she received the sun. Hence she sent forth from her countenance rays which dazzled the sight; and the heat emitted from her mouth after communion was so intense that the person who reached her a drink, felt her hand scorched as if she approached a furnace. In visiting the most holy sacrament, St. Wenceslaus, king and martyr, was inflamed, even externally, with such a degree of heat, that the servant who accompanied him, when obliged to walk on the snow, trod in the footsteps of the saint, and thus felt no cold. "The eucharist," says St. John Chrysostom, "is a fire which inflames us, that, like lions breathing fire, we may retire from the altar being made terrible to the devil." The holy sacrament is a fire which inflames the soul to such a degree, that we ought to depart from the altar breathing such flames of love, that the devil shall no longer dare to tempt us.

But some will say, "I do not communicate often, because I am cold in divine love." But, says Gerson, he who acts in this manner is like the man who refuses to approach the fire because he feels cold. The greater, then, our tepidity, the more frequently we ought to receive the most holy sacrament, provided we have a desire to love God. "If," says St. Francis de Sales, (in his Devout Life, chap. xxi.,) "you are asked why you communicate so frequently, say that two sorts of persons ought to communicate often, the perfect and the imperfect; the perfect to preserve perfection, and the imperfect to

acquire perfection." St. Bonaventure says, "Though you feel tepid, approach, trusting in the mercy of God. The more a person feels sick, the more he stands in need of a physician." — De Prof. Rel. cap. lxxvii. And Jesus Christ said to St. Matilda, "When you are to communicate, desire to have all the love which any soul has ever had for me, and I will accept your love in proportion to the ardor with which you wish for it." — Ap. Blos. in concl. An. fidel. cap. vi. num. 6.

Affections and Prayers.

O enamored of souls, O my Jesus, it is not in thy power to give us greater proofs of love in order to show us that thou lovest us. And what more couldst thou invent to induce us to love thee? Ah! grant, O infinite Goodness, that I may love thee tenderly and with all my strength! And who is there that has greater claims on the affections of my heart, than thou, my Redeemer, who, after having given thy life for my salvation, hast given me thyself entirely in this sacrament? Ah, Lord, that I always remembered thy love in order to forget all things, and to love thee alone without interruption and without reserve! I love thee, O my Jesus, above all things, and I wish to love thee alone. Banish from my heart, I entreat thee, all affections which are not for thee. I thank thee for giving me time to love thee and to weep over the offences I have offered to thee My Jesus, I desire that thou mayst be the only object of my affections. Assist me, save me, and let my salvation consist in loving thee with my whole heart, and in loving thee always in this life and in the next. Mary, my mother, obtain for me the grace to love Jesus Christ; pray to him for me.

THIRTY-FIFTH CONSIDERATION

ON THE LOVING DWELLING OF JESUS CHRIST ON THE ALTARS OF THE MOST HOLY SACRAMENT.

"Come to me, all ye that labor and are burdened, and I will refresh you."—Matt. xi. 28.

FIRST POINT.

HAVING to depart from this world after he had completed the work of redemption, our loving Savior did not wish to leave us alone in this valley of tears. "No tongue," says St. Peter of Alcantara, "can express the greatness of the love which Jesus Christ bears to our souls. Hence, that his absence from us might not be an occasion of forgetting him, this spouse, before his departure from this world, left, as a memorial of his love, this most holy sacrament, in which he himself has remained. He did not wish that between him and his servants there should be any other pledge than himself, to keep alive the remembrance of him." This effort of love on the part of Jesus Christ, merits great love from us; and, according to the revelation said to have been made to his servant, sister Margaret Mary Alacoque, he wished that in these latter times a festival should be instituted in honor of his most holy heart, in order that, by our devotions and affections, we might make some return for his loving dwelling on our altars, and thus compensate the insults which he has received in this sacrament of love, and which he receives every day from heretics and bad Catholics.

Jesus has left himself in the most holy sacrament, first, that all may be able to find him; secondly, to give audience to all; thirdly, to give his graces to all. He, in the first place, remains on so many altars, that all who wish may be able to find him. On the night on which the Redeemer took leave of his disciples to go to death, they shed tears of sorrow at the thought of being separated from their dear Master; but Jesus consoled them, saying, (and the same he then said also to us,) My children, I am going to die for you, in order to show you the love which I bear you. But at my death I will not leave you alone; as long as you shall be on earth, I will remain with you in the most holy sacrament. I leave you my body, my soul, my divinity; I leave myself entirely to you. As long as you shall remain on earth, I will not depart from you. "Behold, I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world." — Matt. xxviii. 20. The Savior, says St. Peter of Alcantara, did not wish to leave his spouse alone at such a distance, and therefore he has left this sacrament, in which he himself, the best of all companions, has remained with her. The Gentiles have invented so many gods; but they could never imagine a God more loving than our God, who remains nigh to us, and assists us with so much love. "Neither is there any other nation so great, that hath God so nigh them as our God is present to all our petitions." — Deut. iv. 7. The holy church applies this passage of Deuteronomy to the festival of the most holy sacrament. — Resp. ii. Noct. iii.

Behold, then, Jesus Christ remains in our tabernacles as if confined in so many prisons of love. His priests remove him from the tabernacle to expose him on the altar, or to give the communion,

and afterwards put him back to be again shut up. and Jesus is content to remain there day and night. But why, my Redeemer, do you remain in so many churches, even during the night, when the faithful lock the doors, and leave you alone? It would be enough for you to remain during the day. No; he wished to remain also during the night, though left alone, that, in the morning, all who seek may instantly find him. The sacred spouse went in search of her beloved, saying to every one she met, "Have you seen him whom my soul loveth?"—Cant. iii. 3. And, not finding him, she raised her voice, and exclaimed, My spouse, tell me where you are. "Show me . . . . where thou feedest, where thou liest in the midday."—Cant. i. 6. The spouse did not find him, because then the most holy sacrament was not instituted; but, at present, if a soul wishes to find Jesus Christ, she has only to go to a church in which the holy eucharist is preserved, and there she shall find her beloved expecting her. There is not a town nor a convent in which the holy sacrament is not kept; and in all these places the King of heaven is content to remain shut up in a case of wood or of stone, often almost without a lamp burning before him, and without any one to keep him company. But, O Lord, says St. Bernard, this is not suited to your majesty. "No matter," Jesus replies; "if it becomes not my majesty, it well becomes my love."

What tender devotion do pilgrims feel in visiting the holy house of Loretto — the holy land — the stable at Bethlehem — the hill of Calvary — or the holy sepulchre; in which Jesus Christ was born, or lived, or died, or was buried! But how much greater tenderness should we feel in a church, in presence of Jesus himself in the blessed sacrament!

The venerable Father John D. Avila used to say, that he knew no sanctuary capable of inspiring greater devotion or consolation than a church in which Jesus remains in the holy eucharist. Father Balthassar Alvares would weep in seeing the palaces of princes filled with courtiers, and the churches, in which Jesus Christ dwells, solitary and abandoned. O God! if the Lord remained only in one church, for example in St. Peter's in Rome, and only on one day in the year, O, how many pilgrims, how many nobles, how many princes would endeavor to have the happiness of being there on that day, to pay court and homage to the King of heaven descended again upon the earth! O, what a splendid tabernacle of gold adorned with gems should be prepared for the occasion. O, with what an abundance of lights should the dwelling of Jesus Christ on the earth be celebrated on that day! But, says the Redeemer, I do not wish to remain only in a single church, or but for a single day; neither do I require so much riches, nor such a profusion of lights. I wish to remain continually all days, and in all places in which my servants are found, that all may find me with facility at all times and at any hour they wish.

Ah, if Jesus Christ had not invented this excess of love, who could have ever thought of it? Should a Christian, after the ascension of the Redeemer into heaven, say to him, Lord, if you wish to show us your affection, remain with us on our altars under the appearance of bread, that we may be able to find you whenever we wish, — would not such a demand be regarded as the extreme of temerity? But what no man could ever even imagine, our Savior has invented and accomplished. But, alas! where is our gratitude for so great a favor? If a prince

came from a distance to a village for the purpose of being visited by a peasant, how great should be the ingratitude of the peasant if he refused to visit his sovereign, or if he paid him only a passing visit.

Affections and Prayers.

O Jesus, my Redeemer, O love of my soul, how much has it cost thee to remain with us in the sacrament! To be able to remain on our altars, thou hadst first to suffer death; afterwards, in order to aid us by thy presence, thou hadst to submit to so many grievous insults in this sacrament. And after all this, we are so slothful and negligent in visiting thee, though we know that thou so ardently desirest our visits for the purpose of enriching us with thy graces when thou seest us in thy presence! Lord, pardon me; for I too have been one of these ungrateful souls. From this day forward, O my Jesus, I wish to visit thee often, and to remain as long as I can in thy presence, to thank thee, to love thee, and to ask thy graces; for it is for this purpose that thou remainest on earth shut up in our tabernacles, and made our prisoner of love. I love thee, O infinite Goodness; I love thee, O God of love; I love thee, O Sovereign Good, amiable above every good. Grant that I may forget myself and all things, in order to remember only thy love, and to spend the remainder of my life wholly occupied in pleasing thee. Grant that from this day forward I may relish no pleasure more than that of remaining at thy feet. Inflame my whole soul with thy holy love. Mary, my mother, obtain for me a great love for the most holy sacrament; and whenever thou seest that I am negligent, remind me of the promise I now make of going every day to visit the holy sacrament.

SECOND POINT.

In the second place, Jesus Christ, in the blessed sacrament, gives audience to all. St. Teresa used to say that all cannot speak with the sovereign. The poor can scarcely hope to address him, and make known to him their necessities, even through a third person. But to speak to the King of heaven, the intervention of a third person is not necessary; all, the poor as well as the nobles of the earth, may speak to him face to face in the holy sacrament. Hence Jesus is called the flower of the fields. "I am the flower of the field and the lily of the valleys." —Cant. ii. 1. The flowers of gardens are enclosed and reserved; but the flowers of the fields are exposed to all. "I am the flower of the field," says Cardinal Hugo, in his comment on this passage, "because I exhibit myself to be found by all." With Jesus, then, in the holy sacrament, all may speak every hour in the day. Speaking of the birth of the Redeemer in the stable of Bethlehem, St. Peter Chrysologus says, that princes do not always give audience; that when a person goes to address the king, the guards send him away, saying that the hour or day for giving audience is not yet arrived, and telling him to come at another time. But the Redeemer wished to be born in an open cave, without a door and without guards, in order to give audience to all, at all hours: "Non est satelles qui dicat; non est hora." The same happens in the holy sacrament. The churches are always open; all can go to converse with the King of heaven whenever they wish. Jesus desires that we speak to him with unbounded confidence; it is for this purpose that he remains under the species of bread.

If Jesus appeared on our altars, as he will on the day of judgment, on a throne of glory, who among us should dare to approach him? But, says St. Teresa, because the Lord desires that we speak to him, and ask his graces with confidence and without fear, he has therefore clothed his majesty with the appearance of bread. He desires, as Thomas à Kempis says, that we converse with him as one friend does with another — "ut amicus ad amicum."

When a soul remains at the foot of the altar, Jesus appears to address her in the words of the Canticles, "Arise, make haste, my love, my beautiful one, and come." — Cant. ii. 10. *Arise*, arise, O my soul, and fear not. *Make haste*, approach to me. *My love*, you are no longer my enemy; for you love me, and you repent of having offended me. *My beautiful one*, you are no longer deformed in my eyes; my grace has made you beautiful. *And come*, tell me what you want; I remain here on purpose to hear your prayers. What joy should you feel, dear reader, if a king called you into his closet, and said to you, *What do you wish for? what do you stand in need of? I love you, and I desire to promote your welfare.* This, Jesus Christ, the King of heaven, says to all who visit him — "Come to me, all you that labor and are burdened, and I will refresh you." — Matt. xi. 28. Come, all you that are poor, infirm, or afflicted; I am able and willing to enrich you, to heal you, to console you. For this purpose I remain on your altars. "Thou shalt call, and he shall say, Here I am." — Isa. lviii. 9.

Affections and Prayers.

Since then, my beloved Jesus, thou remainest on our altars to hear the supplications of the miserable

who have recourse to thee, hear the prayer which I, a miserable sinner, present to thee. O Lamb of God, sacrificed and lifeless on the cross, I am a soul redeemed by thy blood; pardon me all the offences I have offered to thee, and assist me by thy grace, that I may never lose thee again. Impart to me, O my Jesus, a portion of the sorrow which thou didst feel in the Garden of Gethsemani for my sins. O my God! that I had never offended thee! My dear Lord, had I died in sin, I could never more love thee; but thou hast waited for me that I might love thee. I thank thee for the time which thou givest me; and since I can now love thee, I wish to love thee. Give me the grace of thy holy love, but of a love which will make me forget all things, to think only of pleasing thy most loving heart. Ah, my Jesus, thou hast spent thy whole life for me; grant that I may spend at least the remainder of my life for thee. Draw me entirely to thy love: make me all thine before I die. I hope for all graces through the merits of thy passion. I also hope in thy intercession, O Mary; thou knowest that I love thee; have pity on me.

THIRD POINT.

Jesus, in the holy sacrament, gives audience to all in order to bestow his graces on all. St. Augustine says that the Lord has a greater desire of communicating his graces to us, than we have of receiving them. "Plus ille vult tibi benefacere, quam tu accipere concupiscas." The reason is, that God is infinite goodness, and goodness is naturally diffusive; therefore it desires to impart its goods to all God complains when souls do not come to ask his graces. "Am I," he says, "be-

come a wilderness to Israel, or a lateward springing land? Why, then, have my people said, We are revolted; we will come to thee no more?" — Jer. ii. 31. Why, says the Lord, will you come to me no more? Have you, when you asked my graces, found me like a barren or lateward springing land? St. John saw the Lord with his breast full of milk — that is, of mercy — and girded with a band of gold — that is, with the love with which he desires to dispense his graces to us. "I saw one like the Son of man . . . . girt about the paps with a golden girdle." — Apoc. i. 13. Jesus Christ is always ready to bestow his favors upon us; but the *disciple* says that, in the holy sacrament, he dispenses his graces in greater abundance. And, according to blessed Henry Suson, it is in the holy eucharist that Jesus most willingly hears our prayers.

As a mother, whose breasts are full of milk, goes in search of infants to give them suck, in order to be relieved of the burden, so our Lord, from this sacrament of love, cries out, and says to us all, "You shall be carried at the breasts . . . . as one whom the mother caresses, so will I comfort you." — Isa. lxvi. 12, 13. Father Balthassar saw Jesus in the most holy sacrament, having his hands full of graces, to dispense them to men; but found no one to ask them.

O, happy the soul that remains at the foot of the altar to ask graces of Jesus Christ! The Countess of Feria, afterwards a religious of the order of St. Clare, remained as long as she could before the blessed sacrament, and was therefore called the spouse of the sacrament. She continually received treasures of graces at the foot of the altar. Being asked one day how she was employed during so many hours before the tabernacle, she replied, "I

would remain there for all eternity. I am asked what I do before the blessed sacrament. And what do I not do? What does a beggar do in the presence of a rich man? What does a sick man do before his physician? What do I do? I thank my Savior, I love him, I ask his graces." O, how well calculated is the advice contained in these last words to make us draw fruit from our visits to the holy sacrament!

Jesus Christ complained to the servant of God, sister Margaret Mary Alacoque, of the ingratitude of men to him in this sacrament of love. To make her understand the love with which he dwells on our altars, he showed her his heart in a throne of flames, surrounded with thorns and surmounted by a cross, and said to her, "Behold that heart, which has loved men so tenderly, which has reserved nothing, and which has been even consumed to show its love for them. But, in return, the greater part of them treat me with ingratitude by their irreverence, and by their contempt of my love in this sacrament. And what is most painful to me is, that they are hearts consecrated to me." Christians do not visit Jesus Christ, because they do not love him. They spend entire hours in the society of friends; and they feel tediousness in conversing half an hour with Jesus Christ. Some will say, Why does not Jesus Christ give me his love? I answer, If you do not banish the world from your heart, how can divine love enter it? Ah! if you could say, with sincerity, what St. Philip Neri said at the sight of the holy sacrament — *Behold my love! behold my love!* — you should not feel tediousness in spending hours and entire days before the blessed sacrament.

To souls enamored of God, hours spent before

Jesus in the sacrament, appear moments. St. Francis Xavier labored the whole day for the salvation of souls; and what was his repose at night? It consisted in remaining before the holy sacrament. St. John Francis Regis, that great missionary of France, after having spent the entire day in preaching and hearing confessions, went at night to the church. And having sometimes found it shut, he remained outside the door, exposed to the cold and wind, to pay homage, at least at a distance, to his beloved Lord. St. Aloysius Gonzaga wished to remain always before the holy sacrament; but was forbidden to do so by his superiors. In passing by the altar, he felt himself drawn by Jesus to remain, but was compelled by obedience to depart. Hence he would lovingly say to his Savior, "Recede a me, Domine, recede." Lord, do not draw me; allow me to depart; obedience obliges me to go away. If, my brother, you do not feel this love for Jesus Christ, endeavor at least to visit him every day; he will certainly inflame your heart. Do you feel cold? Approach the fire, says St. Catharine of Sienna. Ah! happy you, if Jesus, by his grace, inflames you with his love. Then you shall certainly no longer love; on the contrary, you shall despise all the goods of this world. "When," says St. Francis de Sales, "a house is on fire, all that is within is thrown out through the windows."

Affections and Prayers.

Ah! my Jesus, make thyself known, make thyself loved. Thou art so amiable, thou canst do nothing more to induce men to love thee; how, then, does it happen that so few among them love thee? Alas! I have been among these ungrateful wretches. I have been sufficiently grateful

creatures, who have bestowed any gift or favor upon me; to thee only, who hast given me thyself, have I been ungrateful, so as often to offend thee grievously, and insult thee by my sins. But I see that, instead of abandoning me, thou dost continue to seek after me, and to ask my love. I feel that thou dost continue to propose to me this loving precept — "*Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart.*" Since, then, thou wishest to be loved even by me after my ingratitude, I desire to love thee. Thou wishest for my love, and at present, through thy grace, I desire only to love thee. I love thee, my love, my all. Through that blood which thou hast shed for me, help me to love thee. My beloved Redeemer, I place all my hopes in this blood, and also in the intercession of thy most holy mother, whom thou wishest to assist me by her prayers in the work of my salvation. O Mary, my mother, pray to Jesus for me. Thou dost inflame all thy lovers with the divine love; I love thee tenderly; procure it also for me.

THIRTY-SIXTH CONSIDERATION.

ON THE CONFORMITY TO THE WILL OF GOD.

"And life in his good-will." — Ps. xxix. 6.

FIRST POINT.

All our salvation and perfection consists in loving God. "He that loveth not, abideth in death." — 1 John iii. 14. "Charity, which is the bond of

perfection." — Col. iii. 14. But the perfection of love consists in conformity to the divine will; for, as the Areopagite says, the principal effect of love is, to unite the will of lovers, so that they may have but one heart and one will. Hence our actions, our works of penance, our communions and almsdeeds, please God only inasmuch as they are conformable to the divine will; for, if they are not conformable to the will of God, they are not good works, but are defective, and deserving of chastisement.

Our Savior came down from heaven principally to teach us by example to conform ourselves to the will of God. Behold what he said, as the apostle writes, at his entrance into this world: "Sacrifice and oblation thou wouldst not: but a body thou hast fitted to me .... Then, said I, behold I come .... that I should do thy will, O my God." — Heb. x. 5, 7. You, O my Father, have refused the victims offered by men; you wish that, by my death, I should sacrifice this body which you have given me; behold me ready to do your will. This he frequently declared, saying, that he came on earth only to do the will of his Father. "I came down from heaven, not to do my will, but the will of Him that sent me." — John vi. 38. And by going to die through obedience to the will of his Father, he wished to make known to us his great love for his Father. "That the world may know that I love the Father; and as the Father hath given me commandment, so do I. Arise; let us go hence." — John xiv. 31. Hence he has said that he acknowledges for his disciples only those who fulfil the divine will. "Whosoever shall do the will of my Father that is in heaven, he is my brother, and sister, and mother." — Matt. xii. 50. The accom-

plishment of the divine will has been the only object and desire of the saints in all their works. Blessed Henry Suson used to say, "I would rather be the vilest worm on earth in conformity with the will of God, than be a seraph with my own will." St. Teresa says, "All that he who practises prayer should seek is, to conform his will to the divine will; and let him be assured," adds the saint, "that in this consists the highest perfection. He who shall practise it best shall receive the greatest gifts from God, and shall make the greatest progress in spiritual life." The blessed in heaven love God perfectly, because they are in all things conformed to the divine will. Hence Jesus Christ has taught us to do the will of God on earth as the saints do it in heaven. "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." He who does the will of God shall, as David says, become a man according to God's own heart. "I have found a man according to my own heart, who shall do all my wills." — Acts xiii. 22. And why? Because David was always prepared to do whatever God wished. "My heart is ready, O my God, my heart is ready." — Ps. cvii. 2. He asked nothing else from the Lord, than to teach him to do his will. "Teach me to do thy will." — Ps. cxlii. 9.

O, how great is the value of an act of perfect resignation to the will of God; it is sufficient to make a saint! While St. Paul was persecuting the church, Jesus appeared to him, enlightened and converted him. The saint only offered himself to do the divine will. "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" — Acts ix. 6. And behold, Jesus Christ instantly declared him a vessel of election and apostle of the Gentiles. "This man is to me a vessel of election to carry my name before the

Gentiles." — Acts ix. 15. He who fasts, gives alms, or mortifies himself for God's sake, gives a part of himself to God; but the man who gives his will to God, gives himself entirely to him. All that God asks of us is our heart, that is, our will. "My son, give me thy heart." — Prov. xxiii. 26. In a word, the accomplishment of the divine will must be the object of all our desires, of our devotions, meditations, communions, &c. The object of all our prayers must be, to obtain from God the grace to do his will. And for this purpose, we must implore the intercession of our holy advocates, and particularly of most holy Mary, that they may procure for us light and strength to conform ourselves to the will of God in all things, but particularly in embracing what is opposed to self-love. The venerable John Avila used to say, "A single 'Blessed be God' in adversity, is better than six thousand acts of thanksgiving in prosperity.

Affections and Prayers.

Ah, my God, all my past ruin has arisen from a want of conformity to thy will. O God of my soul, I detest and curse a thousand times the days and moments in which I have, in order to do my own will, contradicted thy holy will. I now give my whole will to thee. Accept it, O my Lord, and bind it so firmly to thy love, that it may never more be able to rebel against thee. I love thee, O infinite Goodness, and through the love which I bear thee, I offer myself entirely to thee. Dispose of me and of all I possess as thou pleasest; I resign myself entirely to thy holy will. Preserve me from the misfortune of doing any thing against thy holy will, and then treat me as thou wishest. Eternal Father, hear me for the love of Jesus Christ. My Jesus,

hear me through the merits of thy passion. Most holy Mary, assist me; obtain for me the grace to fulfil the divine will, in the accomplishment of which my salvation entirely consists; obtain this grace for me, and I ask nothing more.

SECOND POINT.

It is necessary to conform ourselves to the will of God, not only in crosses and adversity, which come directly from God, such as infirmities, desolation of spirit, loss of property or relatives, but also in those which come indirectly from him, that is, through men, such as defamation, contempt, injuries, and all other persecutions. And let us remember that when others injure us in our property or honor, God does not will their sin, but he wills our poverty and our humiliation. It is certain that whatsoever happens, takes place by the divine will. "I am the Lord; I form the light, and create darkness; I make peace, and create evil." — Isa. xlv. 6. And Ecclesiasticus says, "Good things and evil, life and death, poverty and riches, are from God." — xi. 14. In a word, all things, blessings as well as misfortunes, come from God.

The crosses which happen to us are called evils, because we call them so, and because we make them evils; if we accepted them as we ought, with resignation, from the hands of God, they should prove to us, not evils, but blessings. The jewels which give the greatest splendor to the crown of the saints, are the tribulations which they have borne for God, as coming from his hands. What did holy Job say, when he was told that the Sabeans had taken away his property? "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away." — Job i. 21. He

did not say, The Lord gave me these goods, and the Sabeans have taken them away; but, the Lord has given them, and the Lord has taken them away. And therefore he blessed the Lord, knowing that all had happened by his will. "And as it hath pleased the Lord, so it is done; blessed be the name of the Lord."—Ibid. When the holy martyrs Epictetus and Athone were tormented with iron hooks and burning torches, they only said, "Lord, your will be done in us!" And their dying words were, "O eternal God, be blessed for giving us the grace to accomplish in ourselves your holy will." Cesarius relates (lib. x. cap. vi.) that a certain monk wrought many miracles, though his life was not more austere than that of the other monks. Being astonished at his miracles, the abbot asked him one day what devotions he practised. In answer, he said that he was more imperfect than his companions, but that he was always careful to conform himself in all things to the divine will. "And," said the superior, "did you feel no displeasure at the injury which an enemy did to our farm some days ago?" "No, father," replied the monk; "I, on the contrary, thanked the Lord, because I know that he does and permits all things for our welfare." From this, the abbot perceived the sanctity of this good religious.

We ought to do the same when any cross or adversity happens to us. Let us accept them all from the divine hands, not only with patience, but also with joy, in imitation of the apostles, who rejoiced when they were maltreated for the sake of Jesus Christ. "They went from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were accounted worthy to suffer reproach for the name of Jesus."—Acts v. 41. And what greater happiness than

to bear crosses, and to know that, in embracing them, we please God? If we wish to enjoy continual peace, let us endeavor, from this day forward, to embrace the divine will, always saying in all that happens to us, "Yea, Father; for so hath it seemed good in thy sight."—Matt. xi. 26. Lord, this has pleased you; let it be done. To this end we ought to direct all our meditations, communions, visits, and prayers, always imploring the Lord to make us conform to his will. And let us always offer ourselves to him, saying, Behold me, O my God: do with me what you please. St. Teresa offered herself to God at least fifty times in the day, that he might dispose of her as he wished.

Affections and Prayers.

Ah, my divine King, my beloved Redeemer, come, and reign henceforth in my soul with undivided sway. Take my whole will, that it may desire and wish nothing but what thou wishest. My Jesus, I have hitherto offended thee so grievously by resisting thy holy will. This gives me greater pain than if I had suffered every other evil. I repent of it, and am sorry for it with my whole heart. I deserve chastisement; I do not refuse it; I accept it. Preserve me only from the chastisement of being deprived of thy love; and then do with me whatever thou pleasest. I love thee, my dear Redeemer; I love thee, my God; and because I love thee, I wish to do whatever thou wishest. O will of God, thou art my love. O blood of my Jesus, thou art my hope. In thee I hope to be, from this day forward, always united to the divine will. It shall be my guide, my desire, my love, and my peace. In it I wish always to live and repose. "In peace in the self-same I will sleep and

I will rest." — Ps. iv. 9. I shall always say, in whatever shall befall me, My God, thus thou hast willed, thus I will; my God, I wish only what thou wishest; may thy will be always accomplished in me. *Thy will be done.* My Jesus, through thy merits, grant me the grace always to repeat this beautiful dictate of love — *Thy will be done! thy will be done!* O Mary, happy thou, who always fulfilled, in all things, the divine will. Obtain for me the grace that henceforth I too may always fulfil it. My queen, through thy great love for Jesus Christ, obtain for me this grace. Through thy prayers I hope for it.

THIRD POINT.

He who is united to the divine will enjoys, even in this life, a perpetual peace: "Whatsoever shall befall the just man, it shall not make him sad." — Prov. xii. 21. Yes; for a man cannot enjoy greater happiness than that which ariseth from the accomplishment of all his wishes. He who wills only what God wills, possesses all that he desires; for whatever happens to him happens by the will of God. If, says Salvian, the soul that is resigned be humbled, she desires her humiliation; if she is poor, she delights in her poverty; in a word, she wishes whatever happens; and thus she leads a happy life. "Humiles sunt, hoc volunt: pauperes sunt, paupertate delectantur: itaque beati dicendi sunt." Let cold, heat, wind, or rain come, and he that is united to the will of God says, I wish for this cold, this heat, this wind, and this rain, because God wills them. If loss of property, persecution, or sickness befall him, he says, I wish to be miserable, to be persecuted, to be sick, because

such is the will of God. He who reposes in the divine will, and is resigned to whatever the Lord does, is like a man who stands above the clouds, and, without injury or perturbation, beholds the tempest raging below. This is the peace which, according to the apostle, "surpasseth all understanding," (Phil. iv. 7;) which exceeds all the delights of the world; a perpetual peace, subject to no vicissitudes. "A fool is changed like the moon. . . . . A holy man continueth in wisdom like the sun." — Eccl. xxvii. 12. Fools — that is, sinners — are changed like the moon, which increases to-day, grows less on to-morrow. To-day they are seen to laugh, and to-morrow to weep; to-day all joy and meekness, to-morrow all sadness and fury; in a word, they change with prosperity and adversity. But the just man is like the sun, always the same, and uniformly tranquil in whatever happens; for his peace consists in conforming himself to the divine will. "And on earth peace to men of good will." — Luke ii. 14. At the bare mention of the *will of God*, St. Mary Magdalene de Pazzi used to feel so much consolation, that she would fall into an ecstasy of love. When the will is united to the will of God, crosses may produce some pain in the inferior part, but in the superior part peace shall always reign. "Your joy no man shall take from you." — John xvi. 22. But how great the folly of those who oppose the will of God! What God wills shall certainly happen; "for who resisteth his will?" — Rom. ix. 19. They, therefore, must bear the cross, but without fruit and without peace. "Who hath resisted him, and hath had peace?" — Job ix. 4.

And what else but our welfare does God will? — "This is the will of your God, your sanctifica-

tion." — 1 Thess. iv. 3. He wishes to see us saints, that we may be content in this life and happy in the next. Let us remember that the crosses which come to us from God, "work together unto good." — Rom. viii. 28. Even chastisements are inflicted on us in this life, not for ruin, but that we may amend, and gain eternal beatitude. "Let us believe that these scourges of the Lord .... have happened for our amendment, and not for our destruction." — Jud. viii. 27. God loves us so ardently, that he not only desires, but is solicitous for, the salvation of each of us. — Ps. xxxix. 18. And what will he deny us after having given us his Son? "He that spared not even his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how hath he not also with him given us all things?" Rom. viii. 32. Let us, then, always abandon ourselves into the hands of that God who is always solicitous for our welfare as long as we remain in this world. "Casting all your care upon him; for he hath care of you." — 1 Peter v. 7. Think of me, said our Lord to St. Catharine of Sienna, and I will always think of you. Let us often say with the spouse of the Canticles, "My beloved to me and I to him." — Cant. ii. 16. My beloved thinks of my welfare, and I will think only of pleasing him, and of uniting myself to his holy will. We ought, says the holy abbot Nilus, to pray, not that God would do what we wish, but that we may do what he wills.

He who always acts in this manner shall lead a happy life, and shall die a happy death. He who dies with entire resignation to the divine will, gives to others a moral certainty of his salvation. But he who is not united to the divine will during life, shall not be united to it at death, and shall not be saved. Let us, then, endeavor to make ourselves

familiar with some sayings of the Scripture, by which we shall keep ourselves always united to the will of God. "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" Lord, tell me what you wish me to do; I am ready and willing to do it. *Behold the handmaid of the Lord.* Behold, my soul is your servant; command, and you shall be obeyed. I *am thine; save me.* Save me, O Lord, and then do what you please with me; save yours; I am no longer mine. When any serious cross or adversity happens to us, let us say, "Yea, Father, for so it hath seemed good in thy sight."—Matt. xi. 26. My God, this has pleased you; let it be done. Above all, let the third petition of the Lord's Prayer be dear to us: *Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.* Let us say it often with fervor, and let us repeat it several times. Happy we, if we live and die saying, *Thy will be done! thy will be done!*

Affections and Prayers.

O Jesus, my Redeemer, thou hast sacrificed thy life on the cross in order to become the cause of my salvation; have merey on me, then, and save me; do not permit a soul which thou hast redeemed by so many pains, and with so much love, to have to hate thee for eternity in hell. Thou canst do nothing more to oblige me to love thee. This thou gavest me to understand when, before thou didst expire on Calvary, thou utteredst these loving words, *It is consummated.* But how have I repaid thy love? For the past I can truly say that I have done all I could to displease thee, and to oblige thee to hate me. I thank thee for having borne me with so much patience, and for now giving me time to repair my ingratitude, and to love thee before I die. Yes, I wish to love thee, and I wish to love

thee ardently, my Savior, my God, my love, and my all; I wish to do whatever is pleasing to thee; I give thee my whole will, my whole liberty, and all that I possess. From this hour I sacrifice my life to thee, accepting the death which thou shalt send me, along with all the pains and circumstances that shall accompany it. From this moment I unite this sacrifice of mine with the great sacrifice of thy life, which thou, my Jesus, didst offer for me on the cross. I wish to die in order to do thy will. Ah! through the merits of thy passion, give me grace to be, during life, resigned to the arrangements of thy providence. And when death shall come, grant that I may embrace, with an entire conformity, thy holy will. I wish to die, O my Jesus, in order to please thee; I wish to die saying, *Thy will be done.* Mary, my mother, it was thus thou didst die; ah! obtain for me the grace that I too may die in this manner.

Live, Jesus, our love, and Mary, our hope.

END OF THE PREPARATION FOR DEATH.

PROTESTATION OF DEATH.

My God, prostrate in thy presence, I adore thee; and I intend to make the following protestation, as if I were on the point of passing from this life to eternity.

My Lord, because thou art infallible truth, and hast revealed it to the holy church, I believe the mystery of the most holy Trinity, Father, Son, and

Holy Ghost; three persons, but only one God, who eternally rewards the just with heaven, and punishes sinners with hell. I believe that the second person, that is, the Son of God, became man and died for the salvation of men; and I believe all that the holy church believes. I thank thee for having made me a Christian; and I protest that in this holy faith I wish to live and die.

My God, my hope, trusting in thy promises, I hope from thy mercy, not through my merits, but through the merits of Jesus Christ, for the pardon of my sins, perseverance in thy grace, and, after this miserable life, for the glory of heaven. And should the devil, at death, tempt me to despair at the sight of my sins, I protest that I wish always to hope in thee my Lord, and that I wish to die in the loving arms of thy goodness.

O God, worthy of infinite love, I love thee with my whole heart, and more than I love myself; and I protest that I wish to die making an act of love, that thus I may continue to love thee for eternity in heaven; which, for this purpose, I ask and desire from thee. And if, O Lord, instead of loving thee, I have hitherto despised thy infinite goodness, I am sorry for it with my whole heart, and I protest that I wish to die bewailing and detesting forever the offences I have offered to thee. I purpose, for the future, to die rather than commit another sin. And for the love of you, I pardon all who have offended me.

O my God, I accept death, and all the pains which shall accompany my death. I unite them to the sorrows and to the death of Jesus Christ, and offer them in honor of thy supreme dominion, and in satisfaction for my sins. O Lord, for the sake of the great sacrifice of himself which thy divine Son offered

on the altar of the cross, accept this sacrifice of my life, which I offer to thee. I now, for the moment of my death, resign myself entirely to thy divine will, protesting that I wish to die, saying, *O Lord, thy will be always done.*

Most holy Virgin Mary, my advocate and my mother, thou, after God, art and shalt be my hope and consolation at the hour of death. I now invoke thee, and pray thee to assist me in that great passage. My dear queen, do not abandon me at that last moment. Come, then, and take my soul, and present it to thy Son. From this moment I expect thee, and hope to die under thy protection and prostrate at thy feet. My protector, St. Joseph, St. Michael the archangel, my angel-guardian, my holy advocates, come all, and assist me in that last battle with hell.

And thou, my crucified Love, thou, my Jesus, who, to obtain for me a good death, hast voluntarily chosen so painful a death, remember at that hour that I am one of the sheep which thou hast purchased with thy blood. O my Savior, who alone canst console and save me at that hour when every one on this earth shall have abandoned me, and when no friend shall be able to assist me, make me then worthy to receive thee for my viaticum. Do not permit me to lose thee forever, and to go forever, to remain at a distance from thee. No, my beloved Savior; since I now embrace thee, receive me then into thy holy wounds. At my last breath I intend to breathe forth my soul into the loving wound in thy side, saying now, for that moment, Jesus and Mary, I give thee my heart and my soul; Jesus and Mary, I give thee my heart and my soul.

Happy suffering, to suffer for God! Happy death, to die in the Lord!

I embrace thee, my good Redeemer, that I may die in thy embraces. If, O my soul, at your departure from this world, Mary assists you, and Jesus receives you, death shall be for you, not death, but sweet repose.

Prayer to be said every Day for a good Death.

O Lord Jesus Christ, through that agony which thy most noble soul suffered when it went forth from thy blessed body, have mercy on my sinful soul when it shall depart from my body. *Amen.*

PREPARATION FOR DEATH.

DEATH is certain. "It is appointed unto men once to die." — Heb. ix. 27. But the time and nature of our death is uncertain. Hence Jesus Christ says, "Be you ready; for at what hour you think not, the Son of man will come." — Luke xii. 40. He says, *Be you ready;* hence, to save our souls, it is not enough to prepare ourselves to die when death comes; it is necessary at that hour to find ourselves prepared to embrace death in the manner and with the circumstances in which it shall happen. Hence every one will do well to make, at least once in the month, the following acts: —

Behold me, O my God, ready to embrace the death which thou hast appointed for me. From this moment I accept it, and I sacrifice my life to thee, in honor of thy majesty, and also in atonement for my sins, rejoicing that this flesh of mine, for the indulgence of which I have so often offended thee, shall be devoured by worms, and reduced to dust.

My Jesus, I unite the pains and agony which I shall then suffer, to the pains and agony which thou, my Savior, enduredst at thy death. I accept death with all the circumstances which thou dost wish to accompany it. I accept the time, whether it be distant or near. I accept the manner, whether in bed or out of bed; whether with or without warning; and with infirmities more or less painful, as may be pleasing to thee. In fine, I resign myself to thy holy will. Give me strength to bear all with patience.

"What shall I render to the Lord for all the things that he hath rendered to me?" — Ps. cxv. I thank thee, O my God, first, for the gift of faith, protesting that I wish to die a child of the holy Catholic church. I thank thee for not having taken me out of life when I was in sin, and for having pardoned me so often with so much mercy. I thank thee for the great lights and graces with which thou soughtest to draw me to thy love.

I pray thee to make me die receiving thee in the most holy viaticum, that, united with thee, I may go to present myself before thy tribunal. I do not deserve to hear from thy lips, "Well done, good and faithful servant; because thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will place thee over many things; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." — Matt. xxv. 21. I do not deserve to hear from thee these consoling words, because I have not been perfect in any thing; but thy death makes me hope to be admitted into heaven, there to love thee for eternity, and with all my strength.

My crucified Love, have mercy on me; look on me with that love with which thou didst behold me from the cross when thou wert dying for me. "The sins of my youth and my ignorances do not

remember, O Lord." My sins fill me with terror; but this cross, on which I see thee dead for my sake, consoles me. "Behold the wood of the cross, on which was suspended the salvation of the world." I desire to end my life, in order to cease to offend thee. Ah, through the blood which thou hast shed for me, pardon, before death arrives, the offences I have offered to thee. "O blood of the innocent, wash away the sins of a penitent."

My Jesus, I embrace thy cross; I kiss the wounds of thy sacred feet, in which I wish to breathe forth my soul. O, do not abandon me at the last moment of my life. "Assist, we beseech thee, thy servants, whom thou hast redeemed by thy precious blood." I love thee with my whole heart. I love thee more than myself, and I am sorry with my whole soul for having hitherto despised thee. Lord, I was lost, but thou hast delivered me from the world; receive my soul, then, at this moment, for the moment of my death. In the words of St. Agatha, I pray thee, O Lord, who hast taken from me the love of the world, receive my soul. In thee, O Lord, have I hoped; may I not be confounded forever; thou hast redeemed me, O Lord, the God of truth.

O holy Virgin, assist me at the hour of my death. Holy Mary, mother of God, pray for me a sinner, now and at the hour of my death; in thee, O lady, have I hoped; let me not be confounded forever. My protector, St. Joseph, obtain for me a holy death; my holy angel-guardian, holy St. Michael, the archangel, defend me from the powers of hell in that last struggle. My holy advocates, all ye saints of paradise, assist me at that great moment. Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, be in my company at the hour of my death.

A CHRISTIAN IN HIS LAST AGONY ADDRESSING JESUS ON THE CROSS.

Jesus, my Redeemer, in a few moments thou shalt be my Judge. Have mercy on me before the moment of judgment arrives. No, I fear neither my own sins, nor the rigor of thy judgment, when I see thee dead on this cross in order to save me.

Do not cease to comfort me in the straits in which I now find myself. My enemies wish to terrify me by saying that there is no salvation for me. "Many say to my soul, There is no salvation for him in his God." — Ps. iii. 3. But I will never cease to trust in thy goodness, saying, "Thou, O Lord, art my protector." — Ibid. ver. 4. Arise — comfort me, tell me that thou art my salvation. "Say to my soul, I am thy salvation." — Ps. xxxiv. 3.

Ah, suffer not to be lost so many pains and ignominies which thou hast suffered, and so much blood which thou hast shed for me. I ask thee in a special manner, through the agony which thou didst suffer when thy blessed soul was separated from thy sacred body, to have mercy on my soul when it shall depart from my body.

It is true that by my sins I have often insulted thee; but now I love thee above all things. I love thee more than myself; and I repent with my whole heart of all the offences I have offered to thee. I detest and abhor them above every evil. I see that on account of the injuries I have done thee, I would deserve a thousand hells; but the bitter death which thou hast voluntarily suffered for me, and the great mercies thou hast shown me, make me hope

with certainty that, when I appear before thy tribunal, thou wilt give me the kiss of peace.

Placing all my confidence in thy goodness, I abandon myself, O my God, into thy loving arms. "In thee, O Lord, have I hoped; let me never be confounded." By the offences I have offered to thee, I have so often deserved hell; but I hope in thy blood, that thou hast already pardoned me, and I hope to attain heaven, there to "praise thy mercies forever and ever."

I cheerfully accept all the pains which thou dost prepare for me in purgatory; it is just that fire should punish in me all the insults I have offered to thee. O holy prison, when shall I find myself shut up in thee, secure of never again being able to lose my God? O holy fire, when wilt thou purify me from so many stains, and render me worthy to enter the land of bliss?

O Eternal Father, through the merits of the death of Jesus Christ, make me die in thy grace and in thy love, that I may go to love thee for eternity. I thank thee for all the graces thou hast bestowed upon me during my life, and particularly for the great grace of giving me the gift of faith, and of having made me receive, during these last days of my life, all the holy sacraments.

Thou dost will my death, and I wish to die in order to please thee. It is very little for me, O my Jesus, to die for the love of thee, who hast died for the love of me. I gladly say with St. Francis, "May I die for the love of thee, who condescended to die for the love of me."

I accept with joy death and the pains I shall have to suffer till my last breath; give me strength to bear them with perfect conformity to thy will. I offer them all to thy glory, uniting them with the

pains which thou didst endure in thy passion. Eternal Father, I sacrifice to thee my life and my entire being. I entreat thee to accept this my sacrifice, through the merits of the great sacrifice of himself, which Jesus, thy Son, didst offer to thee on the cross.

O mother of God, O my mother Mary, thou hast obtained for me so many graces during life. I thank thee with all the affections of my heart. Ah, do not abandon me at the hour of my death, when I stand in greater need of thy prayers. Pray to Jesus for me; multiply prayers, and obtain for me greater sorrow for my sins and greater love for God, that I may go into thy company to love him forever and with all my strength. In thee, O lady, have I hoped; let me not be confounded forever. O Mary, my hope after Jesus, in thee I trust.

ACTS TO BE MADE AT DEATH.

To St. Ludovina it was revealed by an angel, that the crown of merits and glory which awaited her, should be completed only by the sufferings she was to endure during the last days of life. The same happens to so many holy souls that depart from this world. It is certain that all good acts, and particularly acts of resignation, in accepting death through a motive of pleasing God, are very meritorious for all who die in the grace of God. I subjoin the acts, which may be very acceptable to God at the hour of death.

My God, I offer to thee my life, and I am ready to die at any time that is pleasing to thy will.

"Thy will be done" forever; "thy will be done" forever.

Lord, if thou wishest to leave me a little longer in this world, blessed be thy name; but I do not wish for life, unless I am to spend it all in loving and pleasing thee. I embrace death in order to do thy will, and I repeat, *Thy will be done; thy will be done.* I only ask thee to assist me during all the days of my life. "*Have mercy on me, O God, according to thy great mercy.*" If, then, thou wishest me to quit this earth, I protest that I desire to die, because it is thy will that I should die.

And I wish to die, that, by the anguish and pains of my death, I may atone to the divine justice for the many sins by which I have offended thee and deserved hell.

I wish also to die, that I may cease forever to offend and displease thee in this life.

I wish moreover to die in testimony of the thanks which I owe thee for so many benefits bestowed upon me, and for so much love shown to me in spite of my demerits.

I wish to die, to show that I love thy will more than my life.

I wish (if it is pleasing to thee) to die now, that I hope to be in the state of grace, in order to be secure of praising and blessing thee for eternity.

I wish, above all, to die, in order to go to love thee forever and with all my strength in heaven, where, through thy blood, I hope to arrive, and to be secure of never more ceasing to love thee for all eternity. My Jesus, thou hast accepted the death of the cross for love of me; I accept death, and all the pains which await me, for the love of thee; and I say to thee, with St. Francis, "May I die,

O Lord, for the love of the love of thee, who condescended to die for the love of the love of me."

I pray thee, O my Savior, my love, and my only good, through thy holy wounds and thy painful death, to make me die in thy grace and in thy love. Thou hast purchased me with thy blood; do not suffer me to be lost. Most sweet Jesus, do not permit me to be separated from thee; do not permit me to be separated from thee.

Lord, do not banish me from thy presence. "Cast me not away from thy face." I confess that, by my sins, I have deserved hell; but I am sorry for them above all things, and I hope to attain heaven, to praise for eternity the great mercies thou hast shown me.

I adore thee, O my God, who hast created me. I believe in thee, O eternal truth. I hope in thee, O infinite mercy. I love thee, O sovereign goodness, I love thee above all things; I love thee more than myself, because thou dost deserve to be loved; and, because I love thee, I am sorry with my whole soul for having despised thy grace. I promise to suffer every death, and a thousand deaths, rather than ever more offend thee.

O Jesus, Son of God, who hast died for me, have mercy on me. My Savior, save me, and let my salvation consist in loving thee for eternity. Mother of God, Mary, pray to Jesus for me. This is the time in which thou canst assist me. "*Mary, mother of grace, mother of mercy, protect us from the enemy, and receive us at the hour of death. We fly to thy protection, O holy mother of God. Holy Mary, mother of God, pray for us sinners.*"

Holy St. Joseph, my father, assist me at that hour. Holy St. Michael, deliver me from the devils which lie in wait for my soul. My holy advo-

eates, and all you holy saints in heaven, pray to God for me.

And you, my crucified Jesus, at my last moments, receive my soul into thy arms; to thee I recommend it; remember that thou hast redeemed it with thy blood. My crucified Jesus, my love and my hope, whether I live or die, I protest that I wish for thee, and for nothing else. *My God and my all.* And what can I desire but thee? "For what have I in heaven? and, besides thee, what do I desire upon earth?" — Ps. lxxii. Thou art the love of my heart; thou art all my riches.

To thee, then, who hast redeemed me by thy death, I recommend my soul. "Into thy hands I commend my spirit; thou hast redeemed me, O Lord, the God of truth." Trusting in thy mercies, I say, "In thee, O Lord, have I hoped; let me never be confounded."

O Mary, thou art our hope. To thee also I say, In thee, O lady, have I hoped; may I not be confounded forever.

SIGHS AFTER THE LAND OF BLISS.

Happy the man who is saved, and, quitting this land of exile, enters into the heavenly Jerusalem, to enjoy that day which shall be an everlasting day — a day always joyful, free from all trouble, from all fear of any failure of its immense felicity.

Jacob said, "The days of my pilgrimage are a hundred and thirty years, few and evil, and they are not come up to the days of the pilgrimage of my fathers." — Gen. xlvii. 9. We miserable pil-

grims have to say the same; for we have on this earth to suffer the toils of our exile, afflicted by temptations, troubled by passions, tormented by miseries, and still more by the dangers of eternal salvation. All these should make us feel that this is not our country, but a place of exile, in which God keeps us, to merit, by sufferings, the happiness of entering one day into the land of bliss.

Thus we should always live detached from the world, and always sigh after paradise, saying, When, O Lord, shall I see myself delivered from so many straits? When shall I think only of loving and praising thee? When shall the day arrive, on which, according to the words of the apostle, — "you shall be my all in all things"?— I Cor. xv. 28. When shall I enjoy that unchangeable peace, free from all affliction, and from all danger of losing my soul? When, O my God, shall I see myself absorbed in thee by admiring thy infinite beauty unveiled, and face to face? When, in fine, shall I possess thee, O my Creator, in such a way that I may be able to say, My God, I can never again lose thee?

O my Lord, thou dost see me exiled and afflicted in this land of enemies, where I am engaged in continual interior battles; assist me by thy grace, and console me in this painful pilgrimage. I already see that, much as the world presents to me, it can never give me peace and happiness; but, if thy aid be wanting, I fear that earthly pleasures and corrupt inclinations may drag me into some precipice.

Seeing myself exiled in this valley of tears, I would wish at least to think always of thee, O my God, and to exult in that infinite joy which thou dost possess; but the evil desires of sensual pleas-

ures frequently cry out within me, and disturb my soul. I would wish to have my affections always employed in loving and thanking thee; but the flesh draws me to sensual delights. Hence I am forced to cry out with St. Paul, "Unhappy man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"—Rom. vii. 24. Unhappy me, who have to combat unceasingly not only with external enemies, but also with myself. Hence I am become burdensome and troublesome to myself.—Job vii. 20.

Who, then, shall deliver me from the body of this death; that is, from the danger of falling into sin? The bare fear of this danger is to me a continual death, which torments me, and will not cease to torment me during my whole life. "O God, be not thou far from me; O my God, make haste to help me."—Ps. lxx. 12. My God, do not withdraw from me; for, if thou dost withdraw, I tremble lest I may offend thee. Draw still nearer to me by thy powerful aid; that is, assist me always, that I may be able to repel the attacks of my adversaries. The royal prophet tells me that thou art at hand; that is, that thou givest holy patience to all who are troubled in heart, or interiorly afflicted.—Ps. xxxiii. 19. Remain, then, near to me, O my beloved Lord, and give me the patience which is necessary to overcome the many difficulties that encompass me.

How often, when I begin to pray, do importunate thoughts draw away my attention, and distract me with a thousand trifles! Give me strength to dismiss them when I converse with thee, and to crucify all the evil inclinations which hinder me to unite myself with thee; and take away, I entreat thee, the great repugnance which I feel in embracing

with peace every thing which is not pleasing to self-love.

O house of my God, prepared for those who love thee, after thee do I sigh from this land of miseries. "I have gone astray like a sheep that is lost; seek thy servant." — Ps. cxviii. 176. O my beloved Pastor, who hast come down from heaven to seek after and save the lost sheep, behold, I am one of them that have miserably lost my soul by turning my back on thee. *Seek thy servant.* O Lord, seek after me; do not abandon me, as I deserve; seek me, and save me; take me, and bind me so fast on thy shoulders, that I may never more forsake thee.

At the same time that I desire heaven, the enemy terrifies me by the remembrance of my sins; but the sight of thee, my crucified Jesus, consoles me, and encourages me to hope that I shall one day go to love thee face to face in thy blessed kingdom. Queen of paradise, continue to advocate my cause. Through the blood of Jesus Christ, and through thy intercession, I have a firm hope of being saved.

ON THE SCIENCE OF THE SAINTS.

THERE are two sorts of science on this earth; the one heavenly, the other worldly. The heavenly science is that which teaches us to please God, and to become great in heaven. Worldly science is that which impels us to please ourselves, and to acquire earthly greatness. But this science is true folly in the eyes of God. "The wisdom of this

world," says the apostle, "is foolishness with God." — 1 Cor. iii. 19. It is folly, because it renders foolish all who cultivate it; it renders them foolish, and assimilates them to beasts, because it teaches them to indulge, like beasts, their sensual appetites. "Hominem illum dicimus," says St. John Chrysostom, "qui imaginem hominis salvam retinet. Quod autem imago hominis? Rationalem esse." To retain the image of man, we must be rational; that is, we must act according to the dictates of reason. Hence, as we say that a beast, were it to act according to reason, should act like a man, so, on the other hand, a man who always obeys the sensual appetites, in opposition to reason, must be said to act like a beast.

But how limited is the knowledge of men even concerning the things of this earth, how limited their knowledge of nature, after all the time they have devoted to the study of natural science! What are we but so many blind moles, who, except the truth we know by faith, have only a conjectural, uncertain, and fallible knowledge of what we learn by means of the senses! What writer on natural science, how much soever he may have been applauded by some, has escaped the censure of all others? But the evil is, that worldly science makes us proud and haughty, and prone to despise others. This pride is pernicious to the soul; for St. James says that God refuses his graces to the proud, and dispenses them to the humble. "God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble." — iv. 6.

"O that they would be wise and understand, and would provide for their last end." — Deut. xxxii. 29. O, if men acted according to reason and the divine law, and thus knew how to provide rather for eternity than for their temporal life, which soon

ends, their time should certainly not be spent in acquiring any other knowledge than that which helps us to attain eternal happiness, and to avoid eternal torments.

St. Chrysostom exhorts us to go to the sepulchres of the dead, in order to learn the science of salvation. "Proficiscamur ad sepulchra." O, what beautiful schools of truth are the sepulchres of the dead! How clearly do they teach us the vanity of the world! "Let us," says the saint, "go to the sepulchres; there I see nothing but rottenness, bones, and worms." Among these skeletons which I behold, I am unable to discern the ignorant peasant from the man of learning: I only see that for all, death has put an end to all the glory of this world. What is there now remaining of a Cicero, a Demosthenes, an Ulpian? "They have slept their sleep, and . . . . have found nothing in their hands." — Ps. lxxv. 6.

Happy the man who receives from God the science of the saints! — Wisd. x. 10. The science of the saints consists in knowing how to love God. How many are there in the world who are well versed in the belles lettres, in mathematics, in the modern and ancient languages! But what will this knowledge profit them if they know not how to love God? Happy he, says St. Augustine, who, *though ignorant of other things, knows how to love God.* He who knows God, and loves him, though he be ignorant of the science with which others are acquainted, shall be more honored than all the men of learning who know not how to love God.

"The unlearned," exclaimed the same St. Augustine, "rise up, and bear away heaven." O, how learned were St. Francis of Assisium, St. Paschal, St. John of God! they were indeed unac-

quainted with worldly science, but were well versed in the knowledge of God. "Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them to little ones." — Matt. xi. 25. By the wise are understood worldlings, who seek after worldly wealth and glory, and disregard the goods of eternity. And by the little ones, Jesus Christ means the simple, who, like children, are but little acquainted with worldly wisdom, and care only to please God.

Ah, let us not envy men who know many things; let us envy those only who know how to love Jesus Christ; and let us imitate St. Paul, who declared that he wished to know nothing but Jesus Christ, and Jesus crucified. "I judged myself not to know any thing among you but Jesus Christ, and him crucified." — 1 Cor. ii. 2. Happy we, if we attain a knowledge of the love which Jesus crucified has borne us, and if, from this book of divine love, we learn to love him.

O my true and perfect Lover, where shall I find one who has loved me as much as thou hast loved me? Hitherto, I have lost my time in learning many things which have been altogether unprofitable to my soul; and I have thought but little of loving thee. I see that my life has been misspent. I hear thee calling me to thy love; behold me; I renounce all things; henceforth my only thought shall be to please thee, my Sovereign Good. I give myself entirely to thee; accept me; assist me to be faithful to thee; I wish to be no longer mine, but all, all, all yours. O mother of God, assist me by your prayers.*

* Permit me here to express the great consolation which I derived a few days since from information connected with the subject of the preceding considerations — the science of the

MOTIVES AND AFFECTIONS TO BE SUGGESTED TO THE DYING.

Taken from St. Liguori's Instructions for assisting the Dying.

THE motives of confidence are — first, the infinite mercy of God, who is called the *Father of mercies.* — 2 Cor. i. 3. . . . . Secondly, the passion of Jesus Christ, who has declared that he came to save sinners. . . . . Thirdly, the promises of God to give his grace to all who ask it, whether they be saints or sinners. . . . . Fourthly, the intercession of the saints, and particularly of the divine mother, whom God wishes that we, along with the holy

saints. I have been assured that, after having received so much applause from all Europe for his poetic compositions, which are as noxious as they are beautiful, (I mean those only which treat of profane love,) for the more tender his expressions, the more they are calculated to kindle in the breasts of young persons the pernicious flames of impure affections, the celebrated Signore Peter Metastasio has published a little book in prose, in which he expresses his detestation of his writings on profane love, and declares that, were it in his power, he would retract them and make them disappear from the world, even at the cost of his blood. And I am informed that his poetic compositions are now confined to some pieces on moral or spiritual subjects, which he writes in order to comply with his obligation as poet to the imperial court. He lives retired in his own house, leading a life of prayer. This information has given me unspeakable consolation; because his public declaration and his most laudable example will help to undeceive many young persons who seek to acquire a great name by similar compositions on profane love. It is certain that, by his retraction, Signore Metastasio has deserved more encomiums than he would by the publication of a thousand poetic works; for these he might be praised by men, but now he is praised by God. Hence, as I formerly detested his vanity in prizing himself for such compositions, (I do not speak of his sacred pieces, which are excellent and deserving of all praise,) so now I shall never cease to praise him; and were I permitted, I would kiss his feet, seeing that he has voluntarily become the censor of his own works, and that he now desires so see them banished from the whole world, at the expense, as he says, even of his own blood.

church, salute, as our refuge, our life, and our hope.

The following passages of the Holy Scriptures may be added: "*No one hath hoped in the Lord and hath been confounded.*" — Eccl. ii. 11. No one has placed his hope in God and has been abandoned by him. "He is the propitiation for our sins." — I John ii. 2. Jesus Christ has died in order to obtain pardon for us. "He hath delivered him up for us all; how hath he not also with him given us all things?" — Rom. viii. 32. How shall that God who has given us his Son, refuse us pardon?

I. — Affections of Confidence.

"The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?" — Ps. xxvi. 1. "Into thy hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit; thou hast redeemed me, O Lord, the God of truth." — Ps. xxx.

"We therefore beseech thee, assist thy servants, whom thou hast redeemed with thy blood."

"In thee, O Lord, have I hoped; may I not be confounded forever."

"O good Jesus, hide me within thy wounds." "Thy wounds are my merits." — St. Bernard.

My Jesus, thou wilt not refuse me the pardon of my sins, since thou hast not refused me thy blood.

Passion of Jesus, you are my hope

Merits of Jesus, you are my hope.

Wounds of Jesus, you are my hope.

"The mercies of the Lord I will sing forever."

Mary, my mother, thou hast to obtain salvation for me; have pity on me.

Hail, holy queen, our sweetness and our hope, hail.

Holy Mary, pray for me, a sinner.

Refuge of sinners, pray for me.

We fly to thy patronage, O holy mother of God.

Mary, mother of God, pray to Jesus for me.

II. — Affections of Contrition.

St. Augustine says that every Christian should continue till death to bewail his sins.

"Enter not into judgment with thy servant, O Lord." — Ps. cxlii. 2.

My Jesus and my Judge, pardon me before thou dost judge me.

"An humble and contrite heart, O Lord, thou wilt not despise."

O, my God, that I had never offended thee! Thou didst not deserve to be treated as I have treated thee.

I am sorry with my whole heart, and above all things, for having offended thee.

Father, I am not worthy to be called thy Son. I have turned my back upon thee; I have despised thy grace; I have voluntarily lost thee. Pardon me for the love and for the blood of Jesus Christ; I repent with my whole heart.

Accursed sins, that have deprived me of God, I detest thee, I abhor thee, I curse thee.

My God, what evil hast thou done me that I should have so grievously offended thee? For the love of Jesus, have pity on me.

Never more, O Lord, will I offend thee. I wish, O my God, to love thee during the remainder of my life, whether it be long or short.

In satisfaction for the offences which I have offered to thee, I offer thee my death, and the pains which I shall suffer till death.

Lord, thou hast reason to chastise me; I have sinned grievously against thee; but I entreat thee to chastise me here, and not hereafter.

O Mary, obtain for me a true sorrow for my sins, pardon and perseverance.

III. — Affections of Love.

My God, because thou art infinite goodness and worthy of infinite love, I love thee above all things; I love thee more than myself; I love thee with my whole heart.

My God, I do not deserve to love thee, because I have offended thee; but for the love of Jesus Christ, make me love thee.

I would wish to see thee loved by all men.

I rejoice in thy infinite happiness.

My Jesus, I wish to suffer and to die for thee, who hast suffered so much, and hast died for me.

Chastise me, O Lord, as thou wishest, but do not deprive me of the power of loving thee.

My God, save me; my salvation consists in loving thee.

I desire paradise, in order to love thee for eternity, and with all my strength.

My God, do not send me to hell, as I deserve; there I should have to hate thee, but I cannot bear to hate thee. What evil hast thou done me, O Lord, that I should have to hate thee? Make me love thee, and then send me where thou pleasest.

I wish to suffer as much as thou pleasest; I wish to die in order to please thee.

Bind me, O Jesus, to thee; do not permit me to be ever separated from thee.

O my God, make me all thine before I die.

When shall I be able to say, My God, I can never lose thee?

O God, I would wish to love thee as much as thou deservest.

O Mary, obtain for me the grace to belong entirely to God.

My mother, I love thee ardently. I wish to go to love thee forever in paradise.

IV. — Motives to Resignation.

All our good and our life consists in conformity to the will of God. "Life in his *good* will." — Ps. xxix. 6. God wishes what is most conducive to our welfare. Jesus Christ appeared to St. Gertrude, and offered her life or death. She answered, *I wish, O Lord, what thou wishest.* The Redeemer also appeared to St. Catharine of Sienna, with a crown of jewels, and a crown of thorns, that she might choose between them. Her answer was, *I make choice of that which thou wishest me to choose.*

Affections.

O brother N., if God calls you to another life, are you not content? Yes. Say then, continually, Lord, here I am; do with me what thou pleasest. Thy will be always done; I wish only what thou wishest. I wish to suffer as much as thou pleasest. I wish to die when thou pleasest.

In thy hands I place my soul and body, my life and death. *I will bless the Lord at all times.* Whether thou dost console or afflict me, I love thee, O my Lord, and I wish to love thee always.

O eternal Father, I unite my death with the death of Jesus Christ; and, in union with his death, I offer it to thee.

O will of God, thou art my love.

O pleasure of my God, to thee I sacrifice my whole being.

V. — Motives to desire Paradise.

Blosius relates (Mon. Spir. c. 13) several revelations, in which it is said that some souls in purgatory suffer a particular pain, (called the pain of *desire* or of *languor*,) in punishment of the tepidity with which they desired heaven. This life is a pris-

on, in which we cannot see God. Hence David prayed, "Bring my soul out of prison," (Ps. clxi 8;) and St. Augustine exclaimed, "O Lord, may I die in order to see thee." St. Jerome called death his sister, and said, *My sister, open to me.* Yes; for it is death that opens paradise. Hence St. Charles Borromeo, seeing death painted with a knife in the hand, ordered the painter to cancel the knife, and to substitute for it a key of gold — as the key of heaven.

It will be useful, then, to the dying to think often on the goods of paradise; repeating the words of St. Paul — "Neither eye hath seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man, what things God hath prepared for them that love him." — I Cor. ii. 9.

Affections.

"When shall I come and appear before the face of God?" — Ps. xli. 3. When, O my God, shall I see thy infinite beauty, and love thee face to face? I will love thee always in heaven — thou wilt always love me; we shall then love each other for eternity — O my God, my love, my all. O my Jesus, when shall I kiss the wounds which thou didst suffer for my sake? O Mary, when shall I see myself at the feet of that mother who has loved me so tenderly, and assisted me so frequently?

"Turn, then, O most gracious advocate, thine eyes of mercy towards us; and, after this our exile, show unto us the blessed fruit of thy womb — Jesus."

VI.—AFFECTIONS TO BE SUGGESTED TO THE DYING CHRISTIAN WHEN THE CRUCIFIX IS GIVEN HIM THAT HE MAY KISS IT.

My Jesus, look not on my sins, but on what thou hast suffered for me.

Remember that I am one of the sheep for which thou hast died.

I am willing, O my Jesus, to be consumed for the love of thee, who hast been consumed for the love of me.

Thou hast given thyself entirely to me; I give myself entirely to thee.

O Lord, thou, an innocent, hast suffered for me, more than I, a sinner, suffer.

My brother, kiss these feet which have been wearied in seeking after you, in order to save you. Say, my dear Redeemer, I embrace thy feet, as Magdalene did; make me feel that thou hast pardoned me.

My God, for the love of Jesus Christ, pardon me; and grant me a happy death.

Eternal Father, thou hast given me thy Son; I give myself to thee.

My Jesus, I have repaid thee with ingratitude; have mercy on me; I have deserved hell so often; chastise me here, and not hereafter.

Thou didst not abandon me when I forsook thee; do not abandon me now that I seek thee.

Most sweet Jesus, do not permit me to be separated from thee.

"Who shall separate me from the love of Christ?"

O Lord Jesus Christ, through the agony which thy most noble soul suffered when it went forth from thy most blessed body, have mercy on my sinful soul when it shall depart from my body. Amen.

My Jesus, thou hast died for the love of me; I wish to die for the love of thee.

VII.—Affections to be suggested to Religious and Priests at Death.

"In peace, in the self-same, I will sleep and I will rest."

My God and my all. O, happy me, if I lose all things to gain thee, O my Sovereign Good.

"Into thy hands I commend my spirit."

"Cast me not away from thy face."

Most sweet Jesus, do not permit me to be separated from thee.

May I die for the love of thee, who died for the love of me.

"A contrite and humbled heart, O God, thou wilt not despise."

"In thee, O Lord, have I hoped; may I not be confounded forever."

I will love thee, O Lord, my strength.

Ah! Lord, may I die in order to see thee.

What have I in heaven, and besides thee what do I desire on earth?

Thou art the God of my heart, and the God that is my portion forever.

The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?

Father, I have sinned; I am not worthy to be called thy child.

Turn away thy face from my sins.

I am thine; save me.

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?

Give me thy love along with thy grace, and I am sufficiently rich.

My beloved to me and I to him.

The mercies of the Lord I will sing forever.

Holy Mary, mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death.

Hail, holy queen, our life, our sweetness, and our hope.

Refuge of sinners, pray for us.

Mary, mother of grace, mother of mercy, defend us against the enemy, and receive us at the hour of death.

O salvation of them who invoke thee.

VIII.—Affections to be suggested during the Last Agony.

O my God, I believe in thee, the infallible Truth; I hope in thee, O infinite Mercy; I love thee, O infinite Goodness. What have I in heaven, and besides thee what do I desire on earth?

Thou art the God of my heart, and the God that is my portion forever.

May I die for the love of thee, who died for the love of me.

In peace, in the self-same, I will sleep and I will rest.

My God, do not suffer me to be lost.

I wish for nothing but thee, O infinite Goodness; I love thee, I love thee, I love thee.

[Let it be here observed, that for persons in their agony, the acts to be most frequently suggested are acts of love and of contrition.]

My Jesus, in a few moments thou shalt be my Judge; pardon me; I love thee, and because I love thee I am sorry for having offended thee.

Most sweet Jesus, do not permit me to be separated from thee.

Blood of Jesus, wash me. Passion of Jesus, save me.

Into thy hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit.

May I die, O Lord, in order to see thee.

Mary, my mother, pray to Jesus for me.

Turn thine eyes of mercy towards us, and, after this our exile, show unto us the blessed fruit of thy womb — Jesus.

O Mary, now is the time to help thy servant.

My mother, do not abandon me.

Land of beauty, land of love, when shall I see thee?

O my God, when shall I love thee face to face?

O my Jesus, when shall I see thee, secure of never being able to lose thee?

My God and my all.

I am willing to lose all things in order to gain thee, O my God.

O my God, for the love of Jesus, have mercy on me.

O Lord, send me to purgatory as long as thou pleasest, but do not condemn me to hell, where I could never love thee.

"We therefore beseech thee, O Lord, assist thy servants, whom thou hast redeemed with thy precious blood."

O eternal God, I wish and hope to love thee for eternity.

My Love is crucified. My Jesus and my Love has died for me.

Incline unto my aid, O God; O Lord, make haste to help me.

Eternal Father, for the love of Jesus Christ, give me thy grace.

I love thee, I repent, &c.

How can I thank thee, O my God, for all the graces thou hast bestowed upon me? I hope to go to heaven to thank thee for eternity.

Mary, Mother of Grace, Mother of Mercy, defend us against the enemy, and receive us at the hour of our death.

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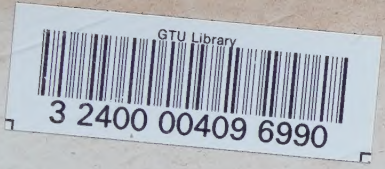

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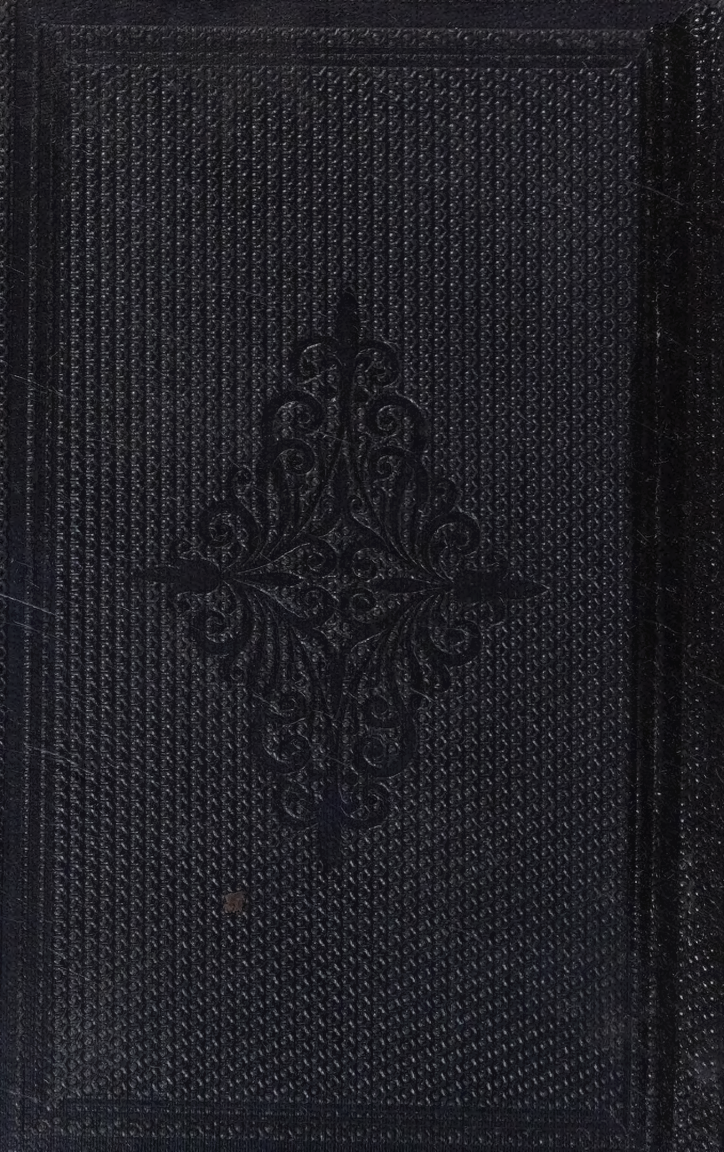
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